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Vits et al.

(10) **Patent No.: US 6,886,889 B2**
(45) **Date of Patent: May 3, 2005**

- (54) **RESTRAINT SYSTEM FOR A VEHICLE** 4,648,625 A 3/1987 Lynch
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- (*) Notice: Subject to any disclaimer, the term of this
 patent is extended or adjusted under 35
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(Continued)

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(22) Filed: **Sep. 17, 2002**

(65) **Prior Publication Data**

US 2003/0025380 A1 Feb. 6, 2003

Related U.S. Application Data

- (63) Continuation-in-part of application No. 09/734,361, filed on
 Dec. 11, 2000, now Pat. No. 6,485,098, which is a continu-
 ation of application No. 09/479,197, filed on Jan. 7, 2000,
 now abandoned, which is a continuation-in-part of applica-
 tion No. 09/183,088, filed on Oct. 30, 1998, now Pat. No.
 6,123,388.
- (60) Provisional application No. 60/362,203, filed on Mar. 5,
 2002.
- (51) **Int. Cl.**⁷ **A47C 7/02**
- (52) **U.S. Cl.** **297/452.18; 297/216.13;**
297/452.65; 297/440.21
- (58) **Field of Search** **297/452.18, 452.65,**
297/440.22, 440.21, 216.1, 216.13

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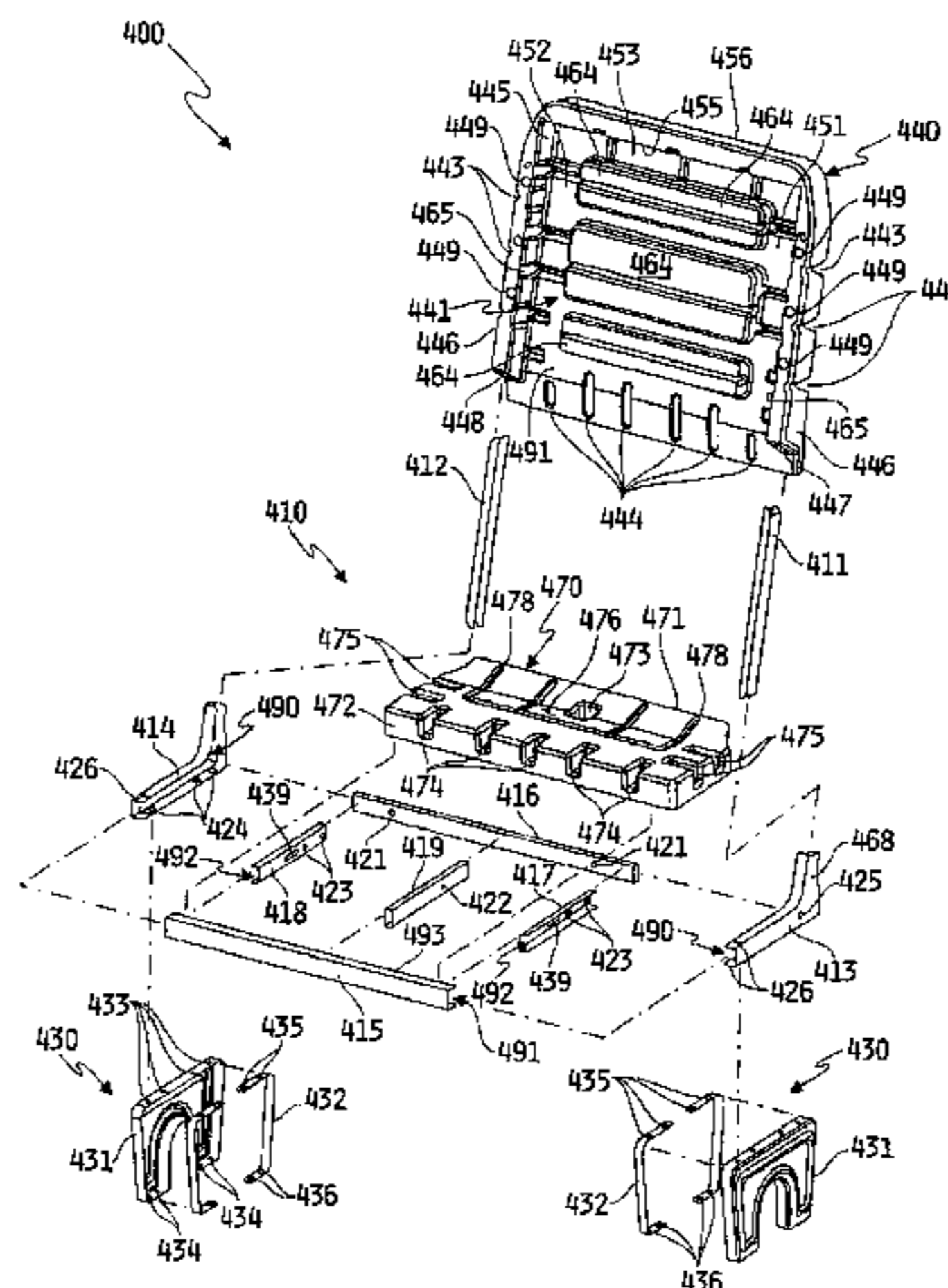
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(57) **ABSTRACT**

A passenger vehicle seat and restraint system comprising a
 frame mountable to a vehicle and a restraint member and a
 seat member coupled to the frame to form a seat for
 supporting an occupant. The vehicle seat may further com-
 prise a seat back frame movably attached to the frame and
 a restraint harness affixed to the frame and the seat back
 frame for securing the occupant thereto.

44 Claims, 42 Drawing Sheets



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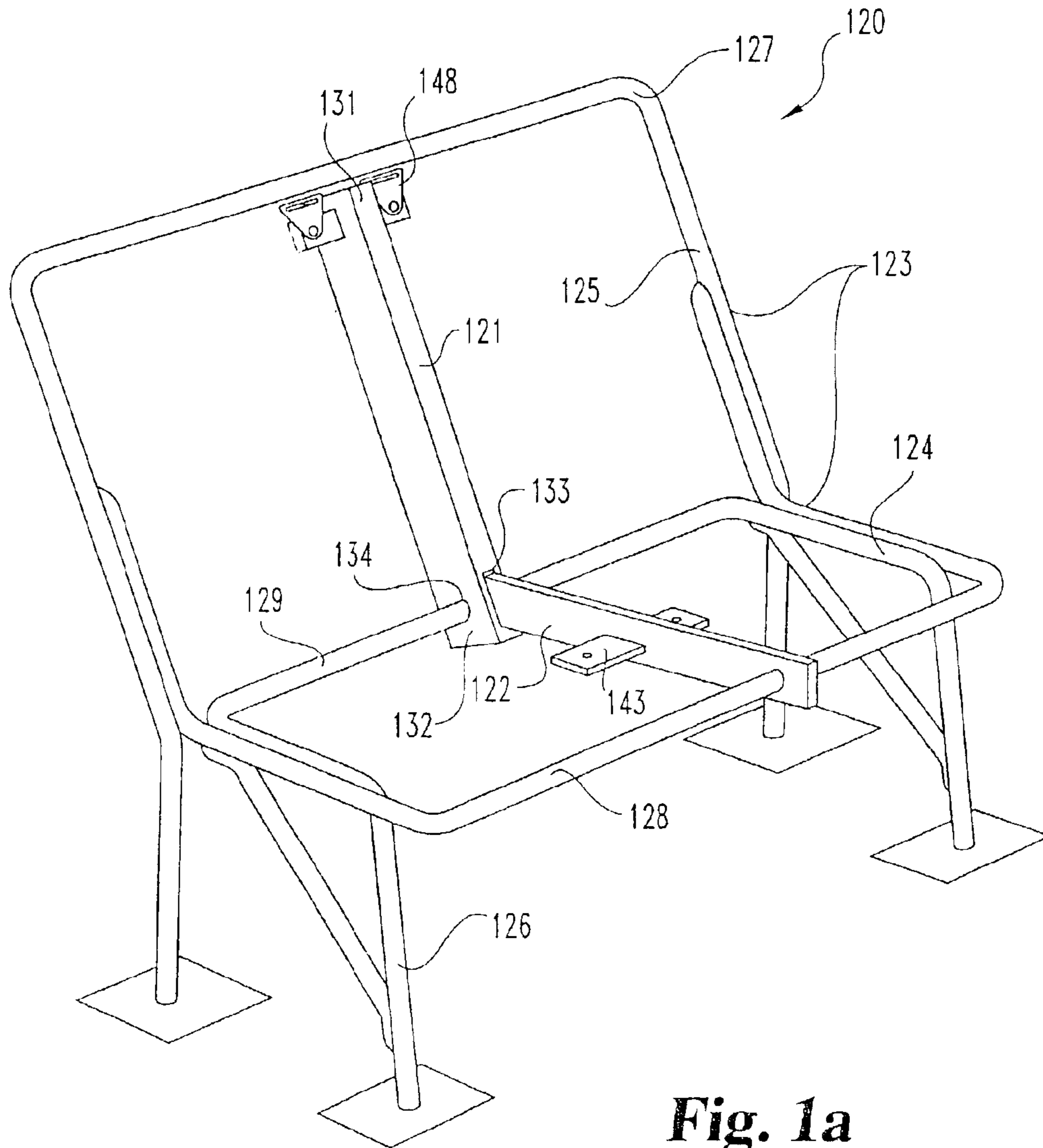


Fig. 1a

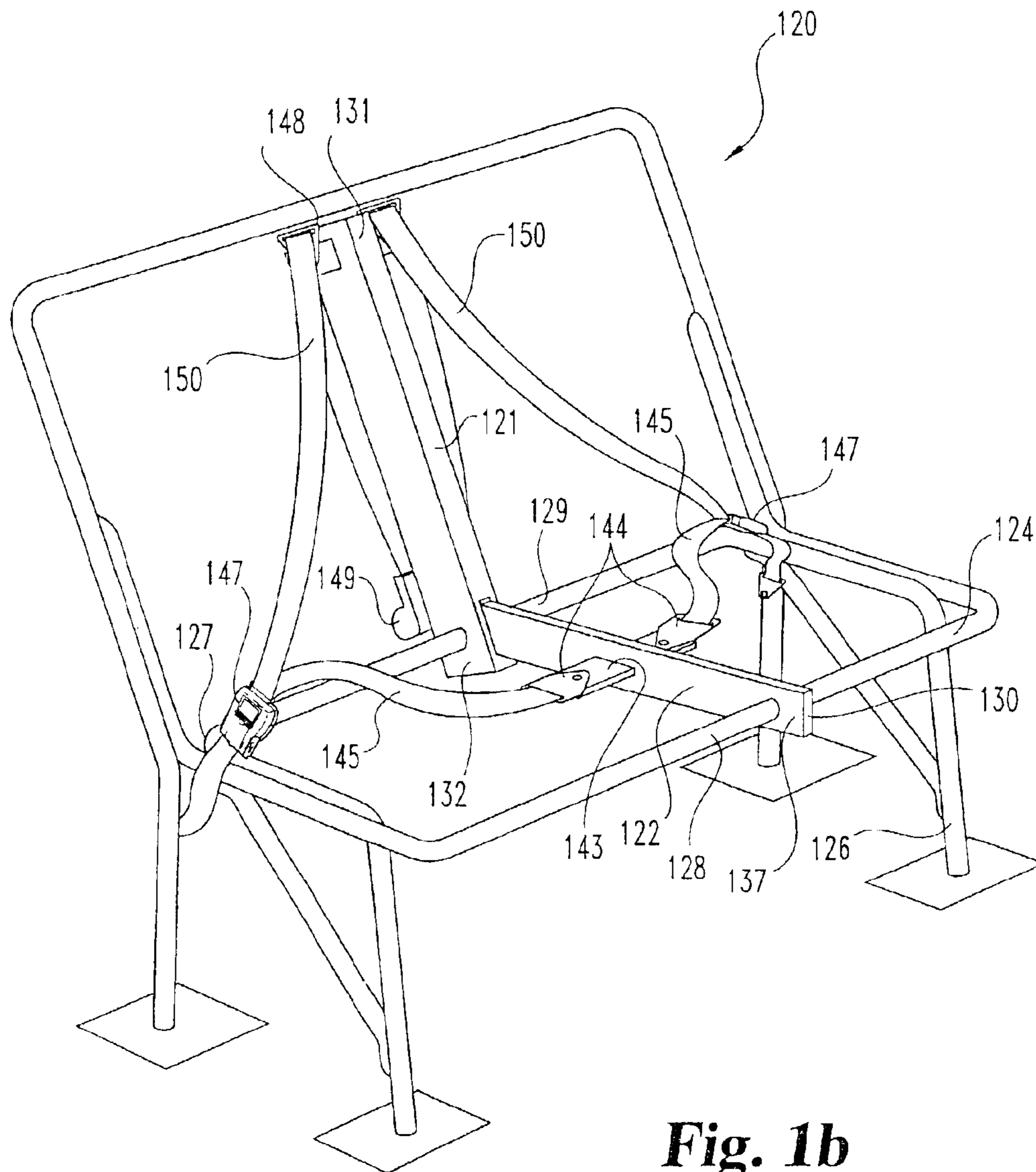


Fig. 1b

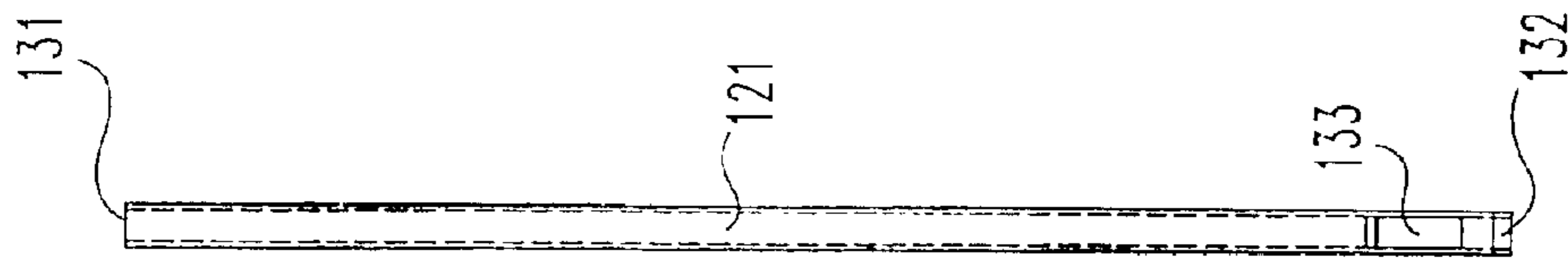


Fig. 2b

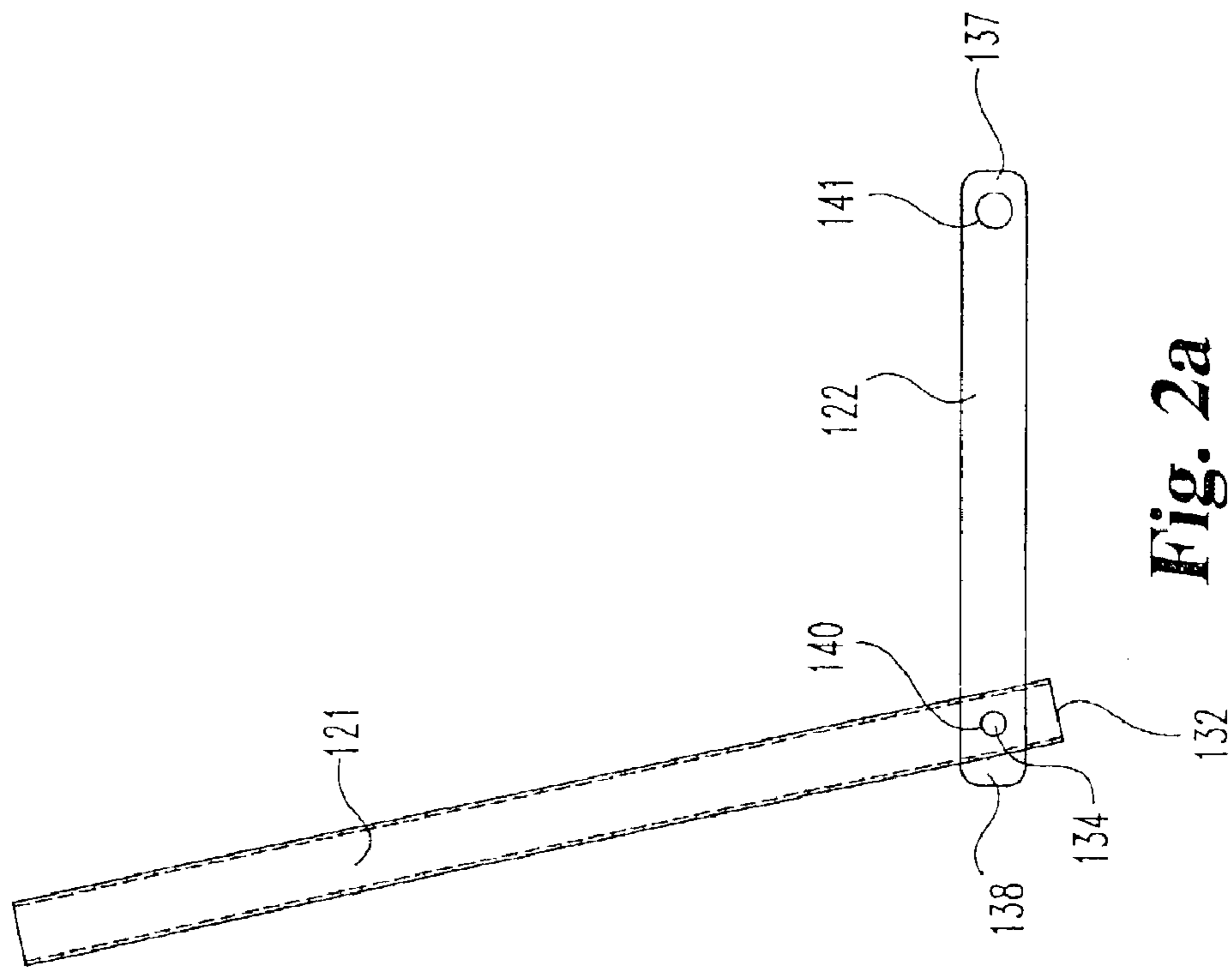


Fig. 2a

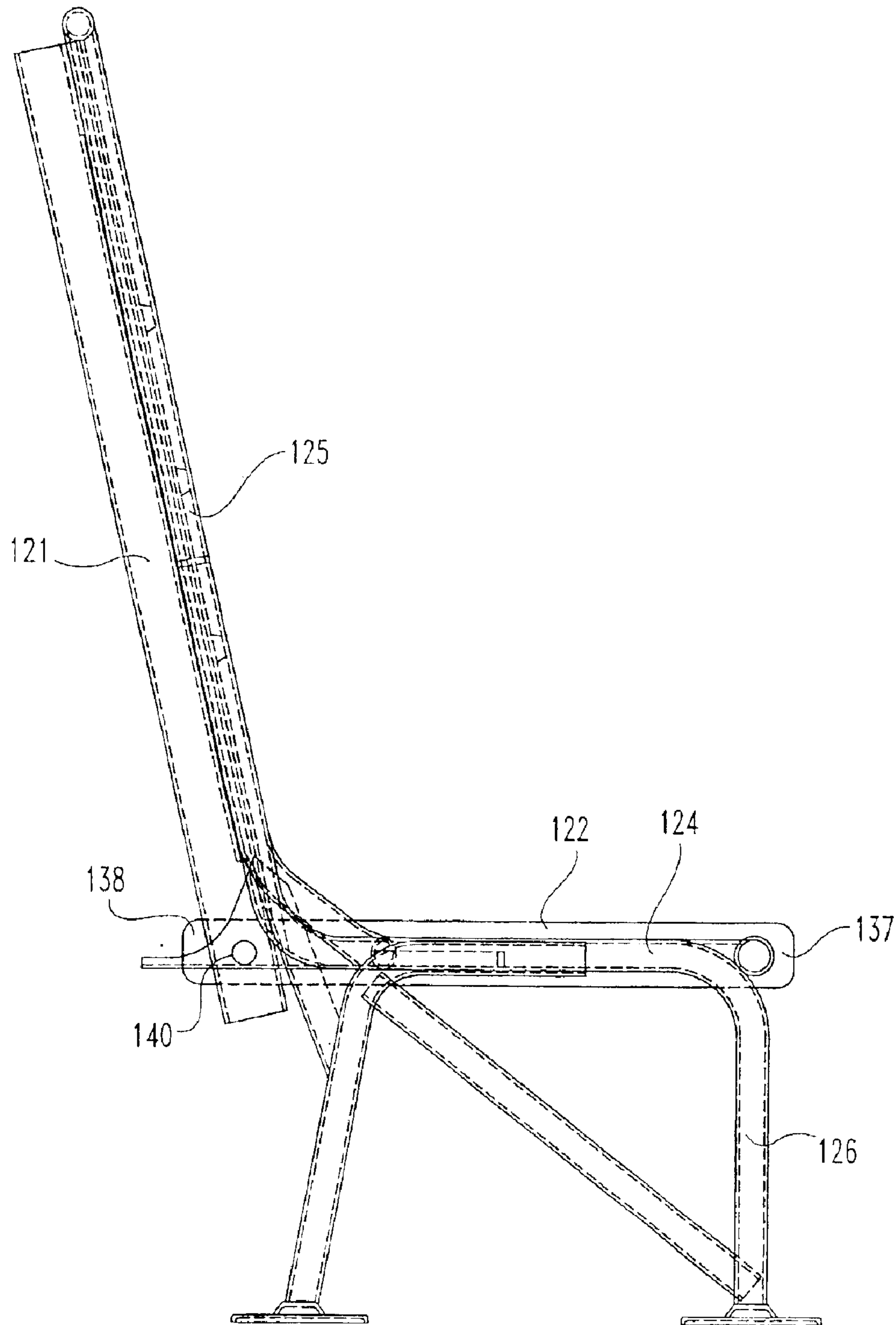


Fig. 2c

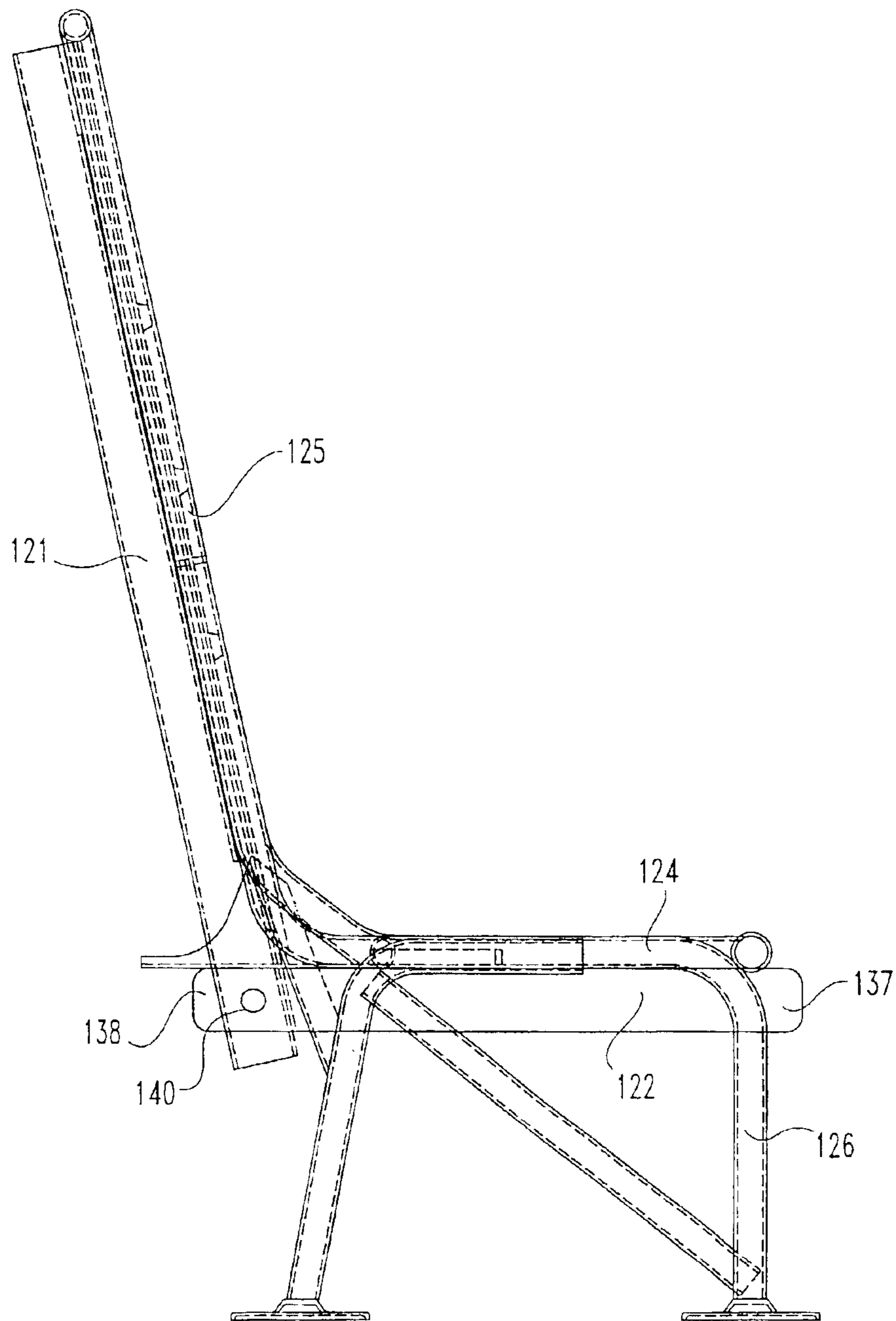


Fig. 2d

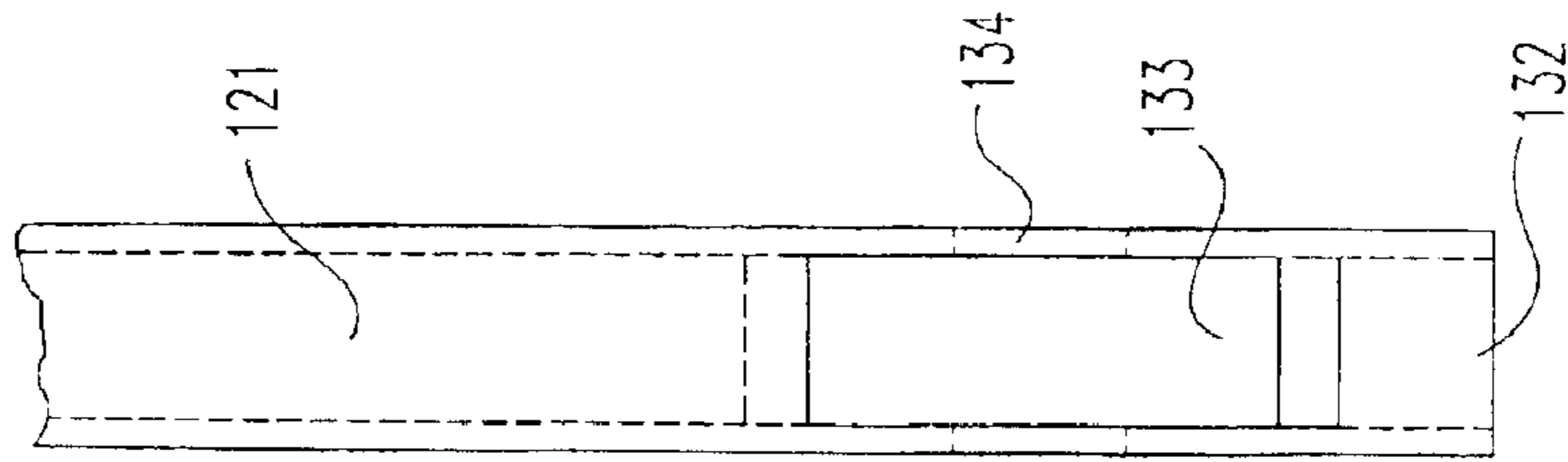


Fig. 3a

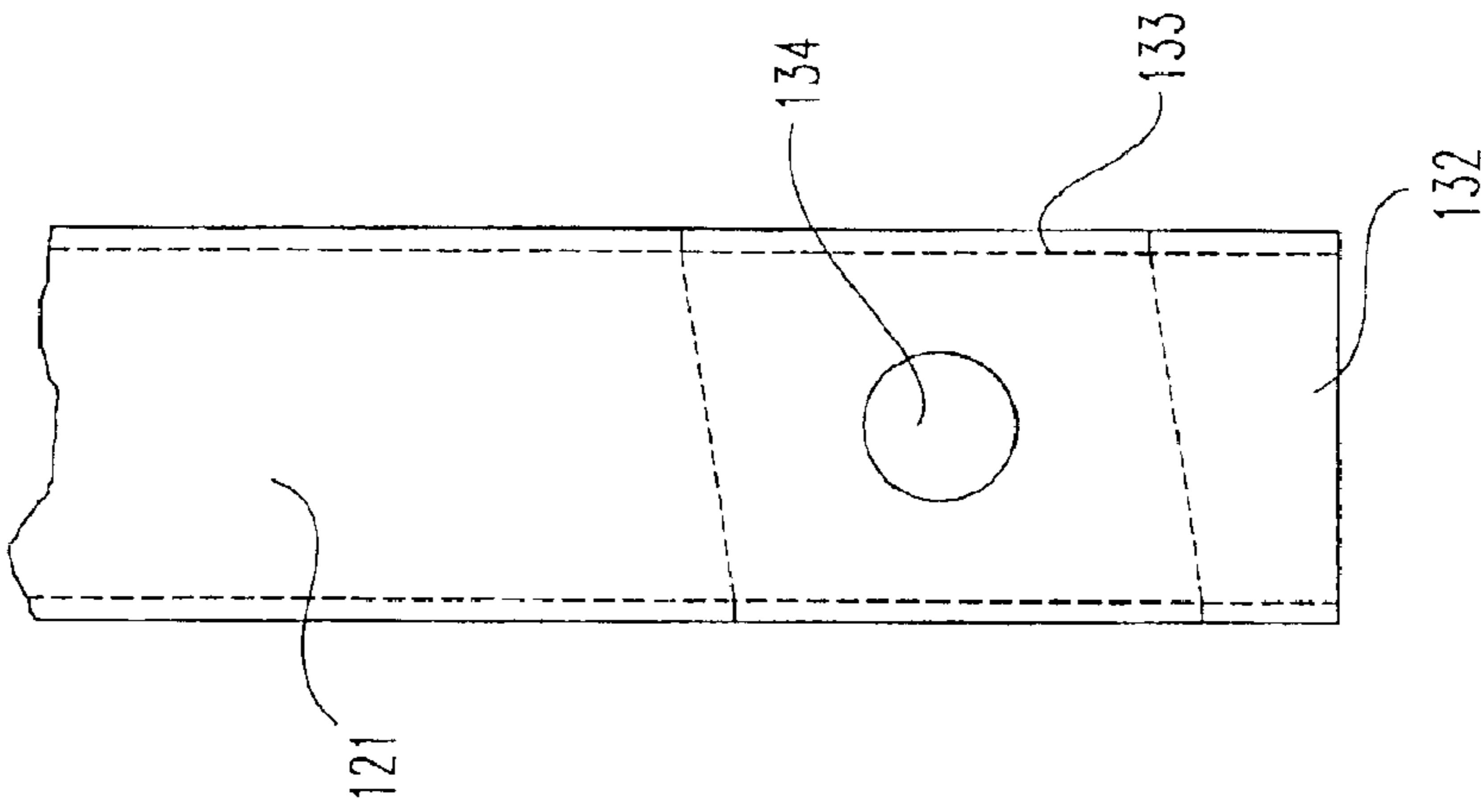


Fig. 3b

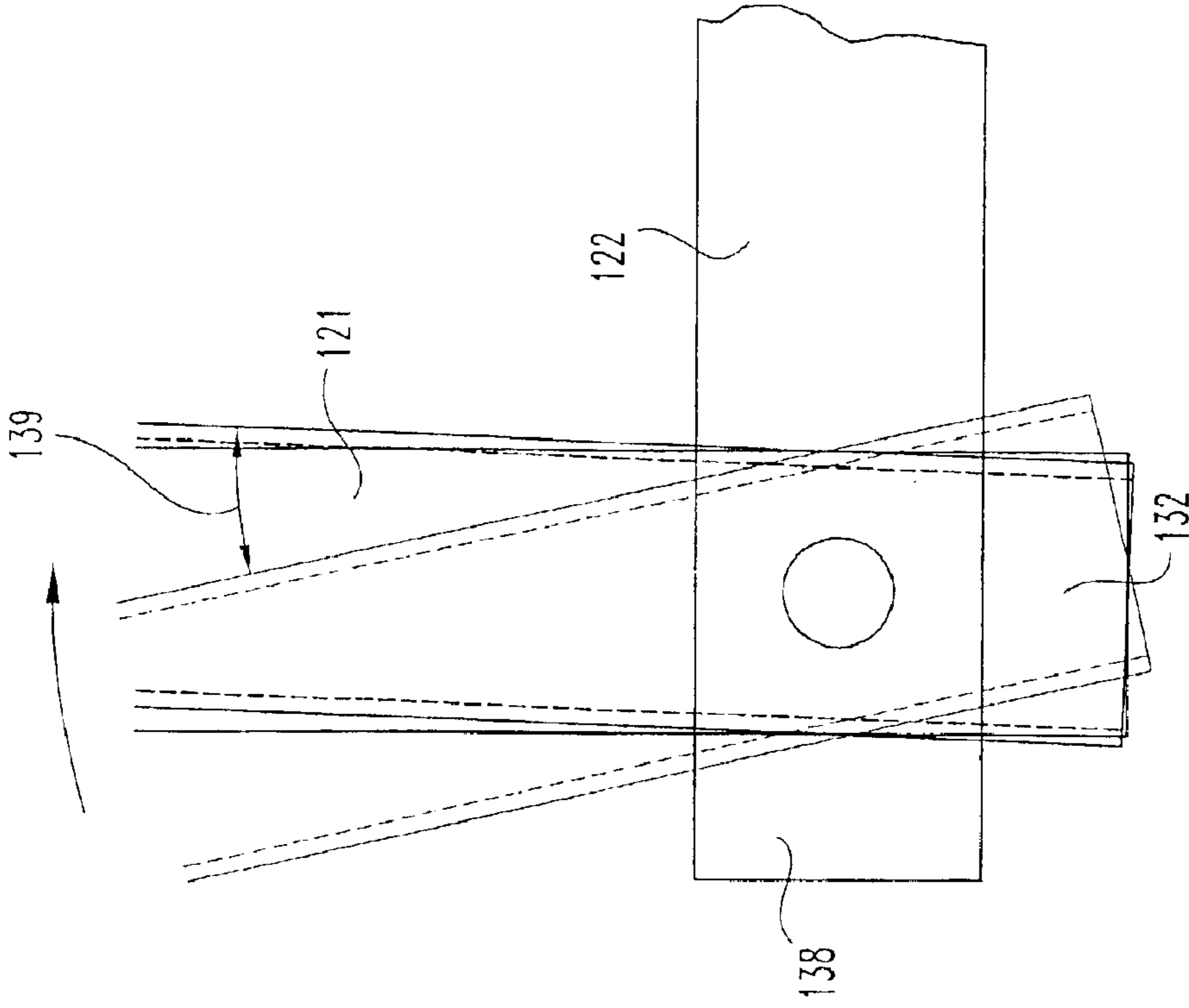


Fig. 3c

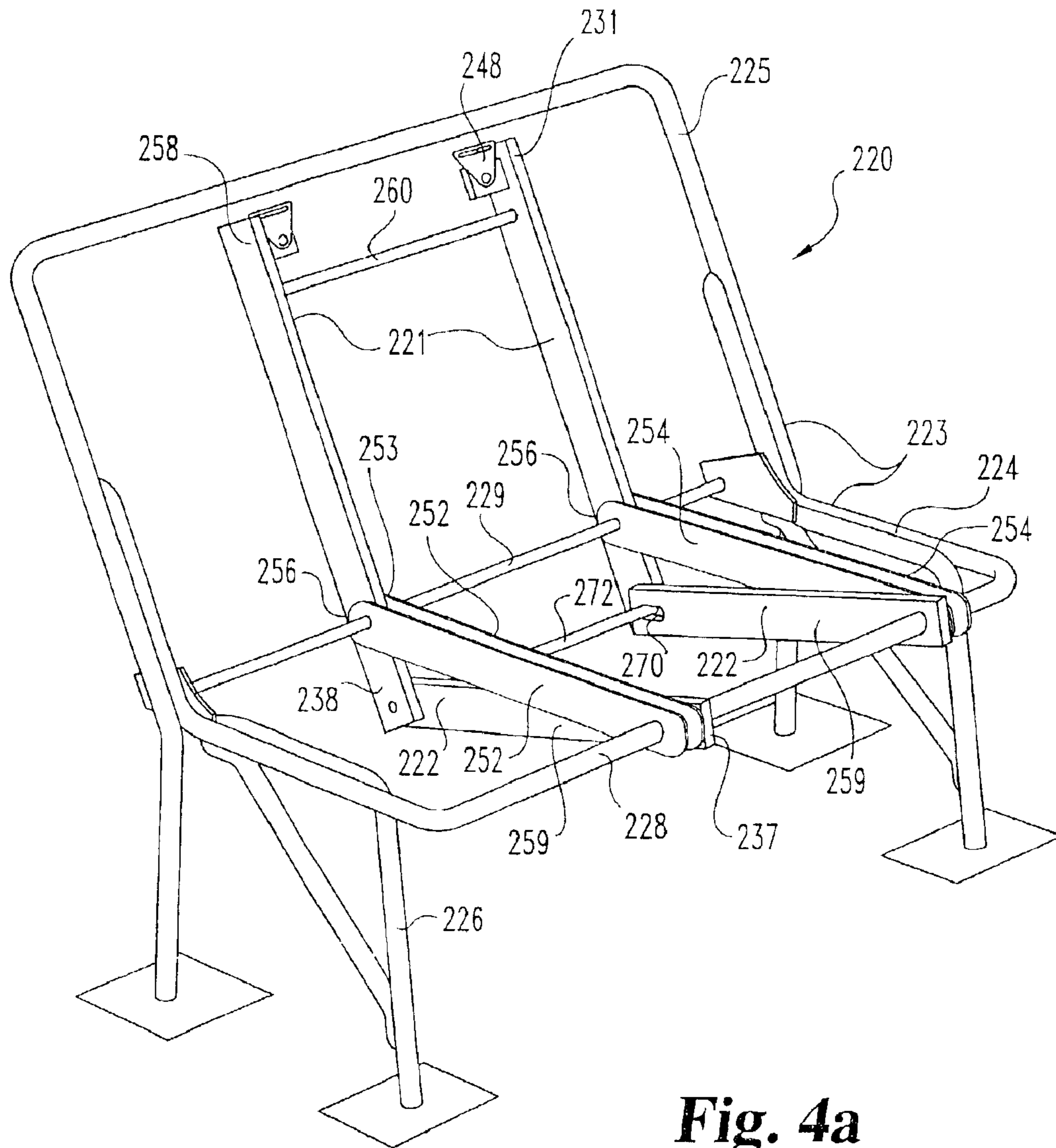


Fig. 4a

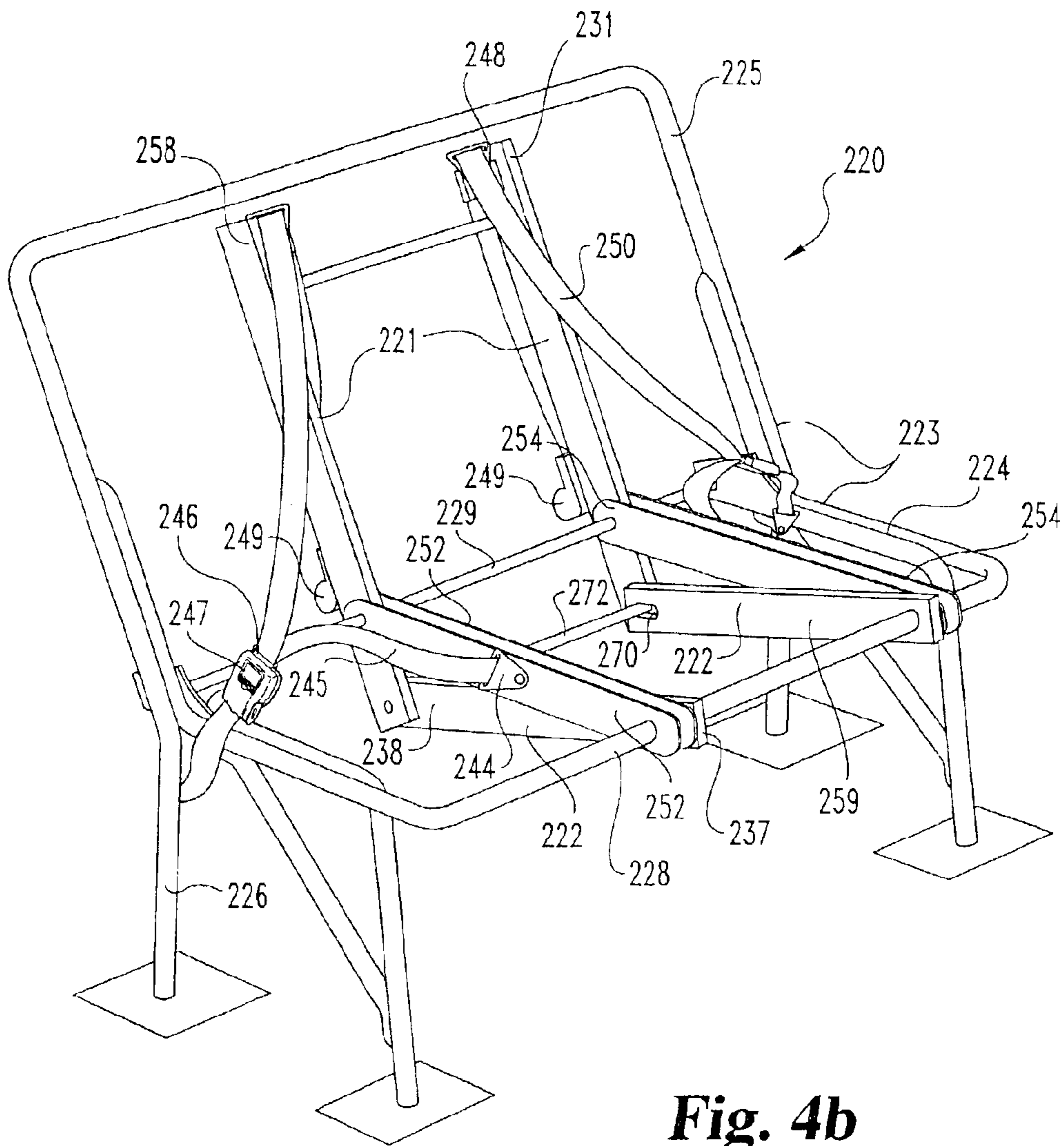


Fig. 4b

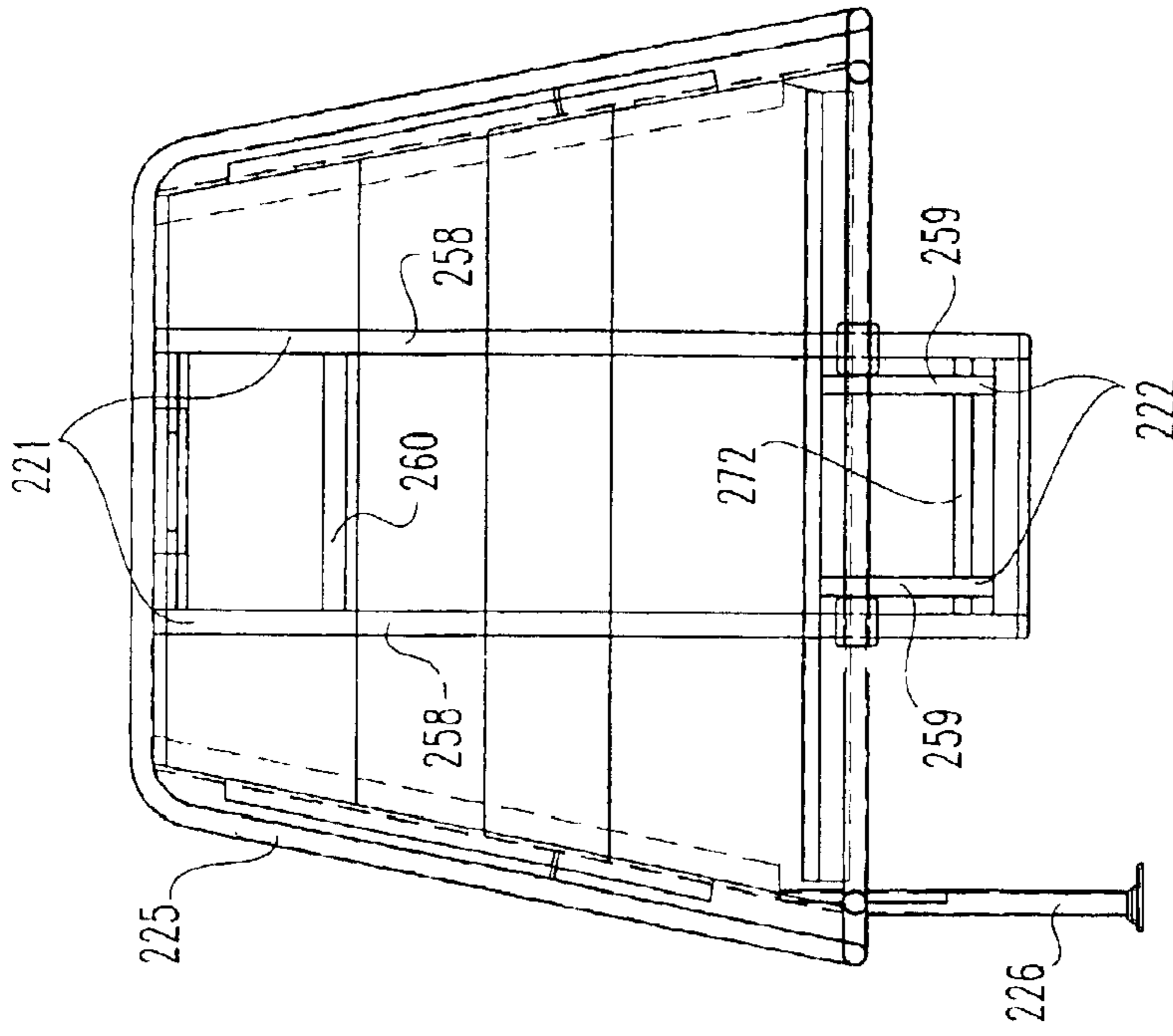


Fig. 5c

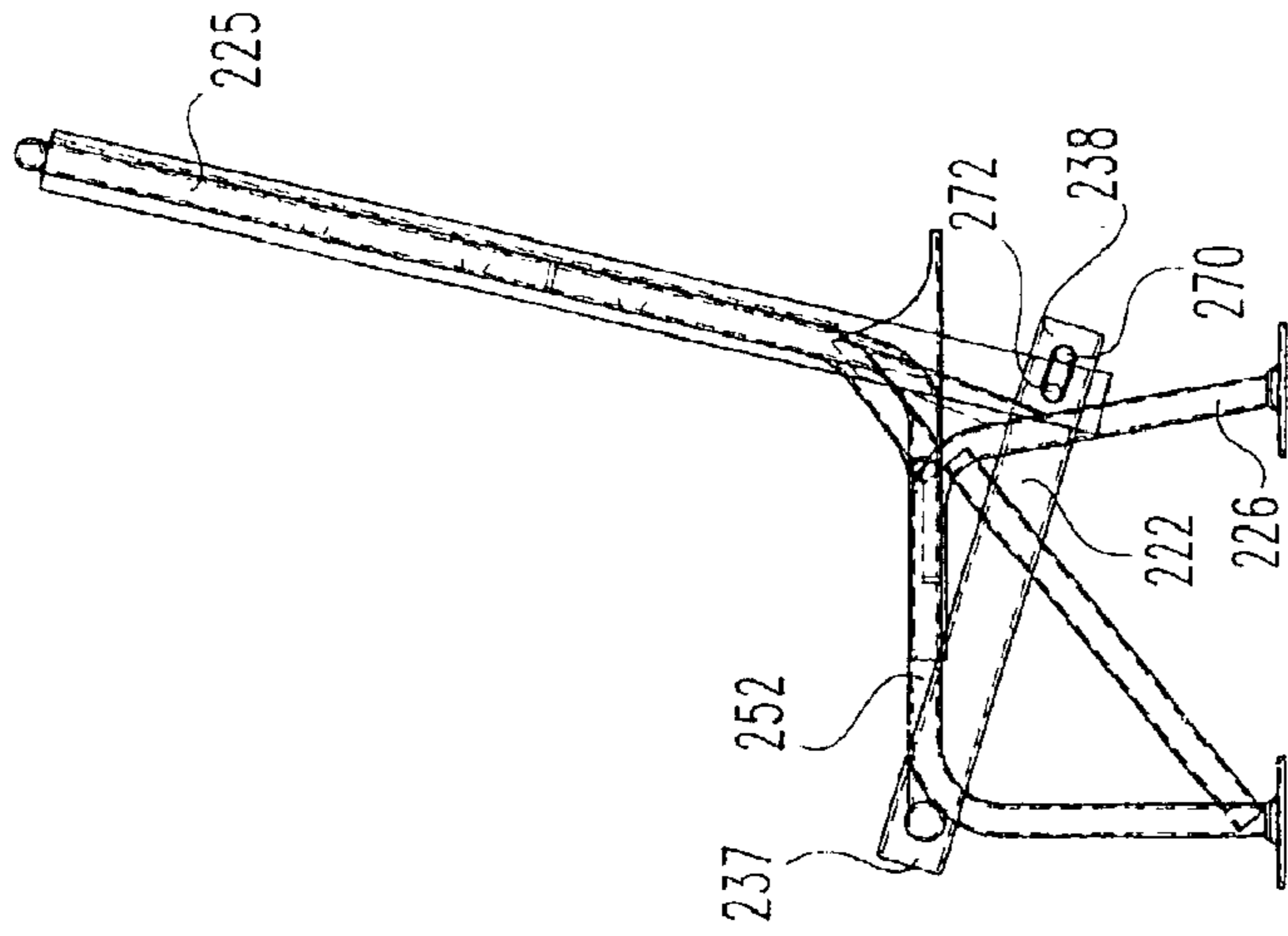


Fig. 5b

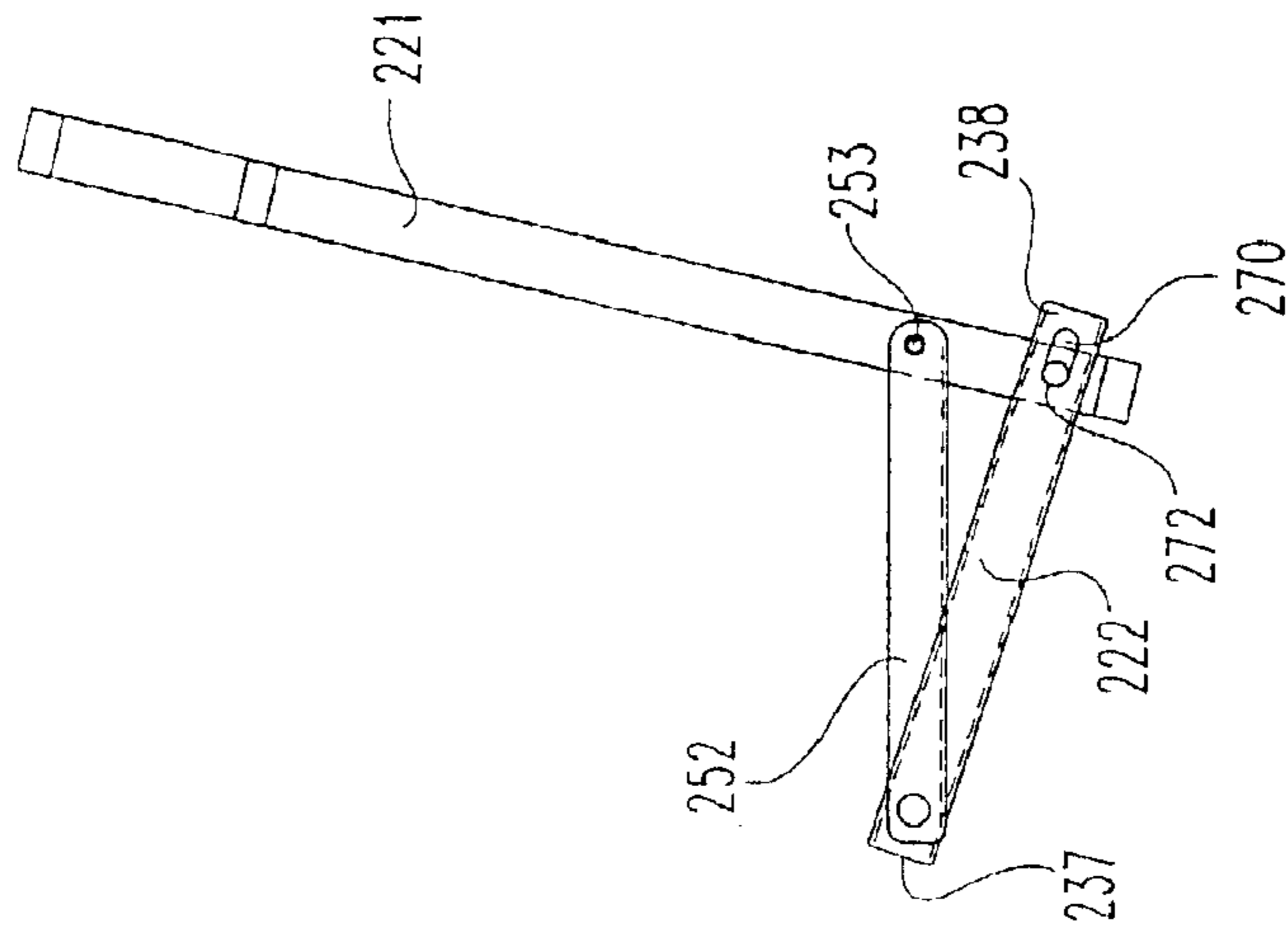


Fig. 5a

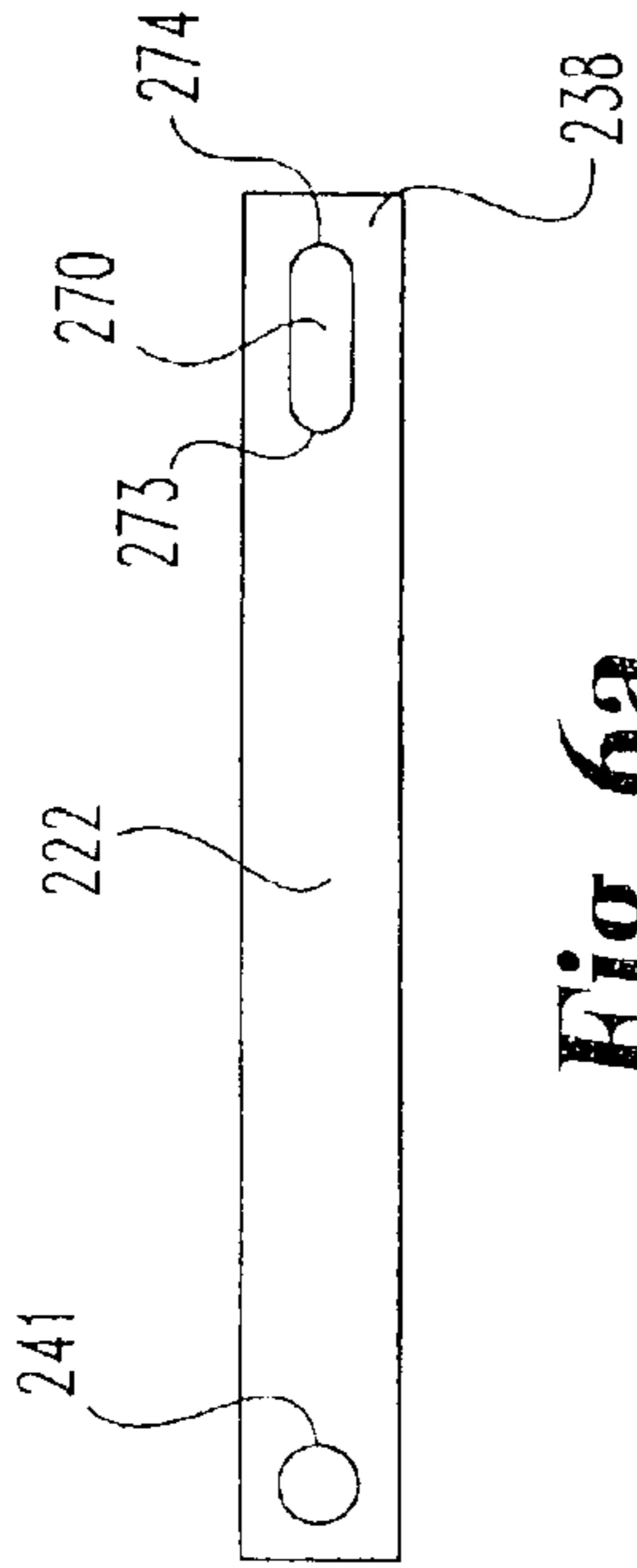


Fig. 6a

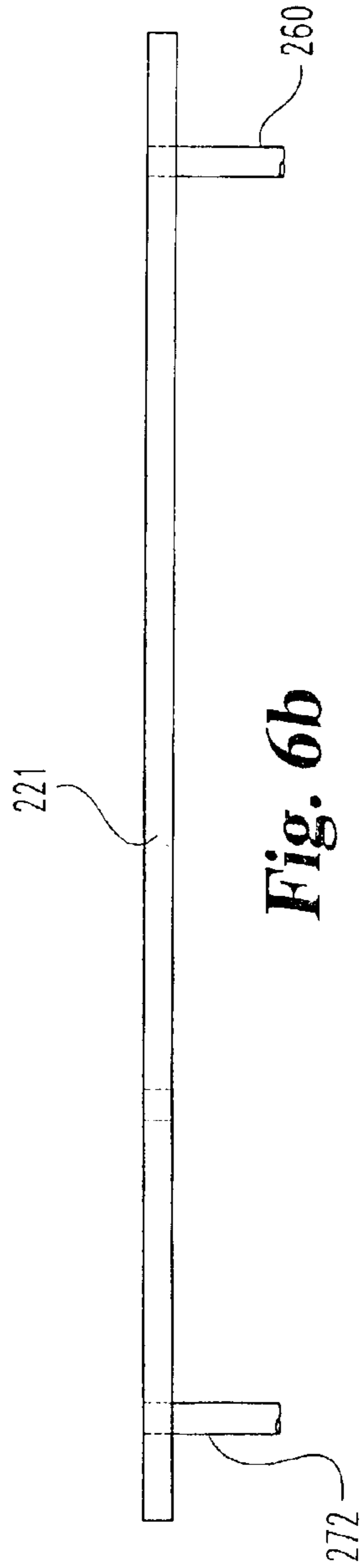


Fig. 6b

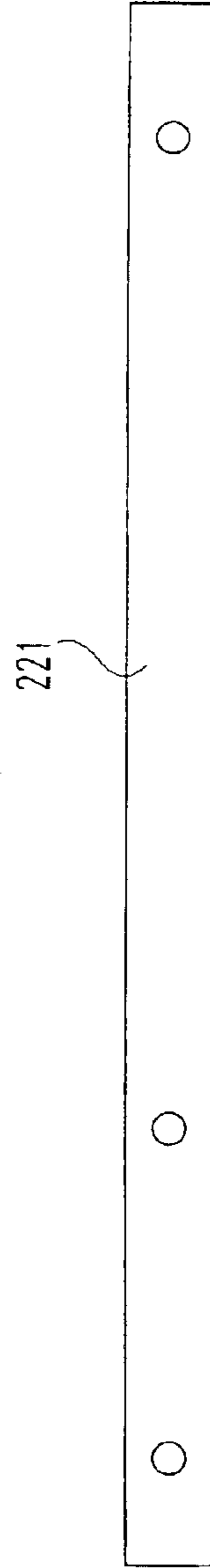


Fig. 6c

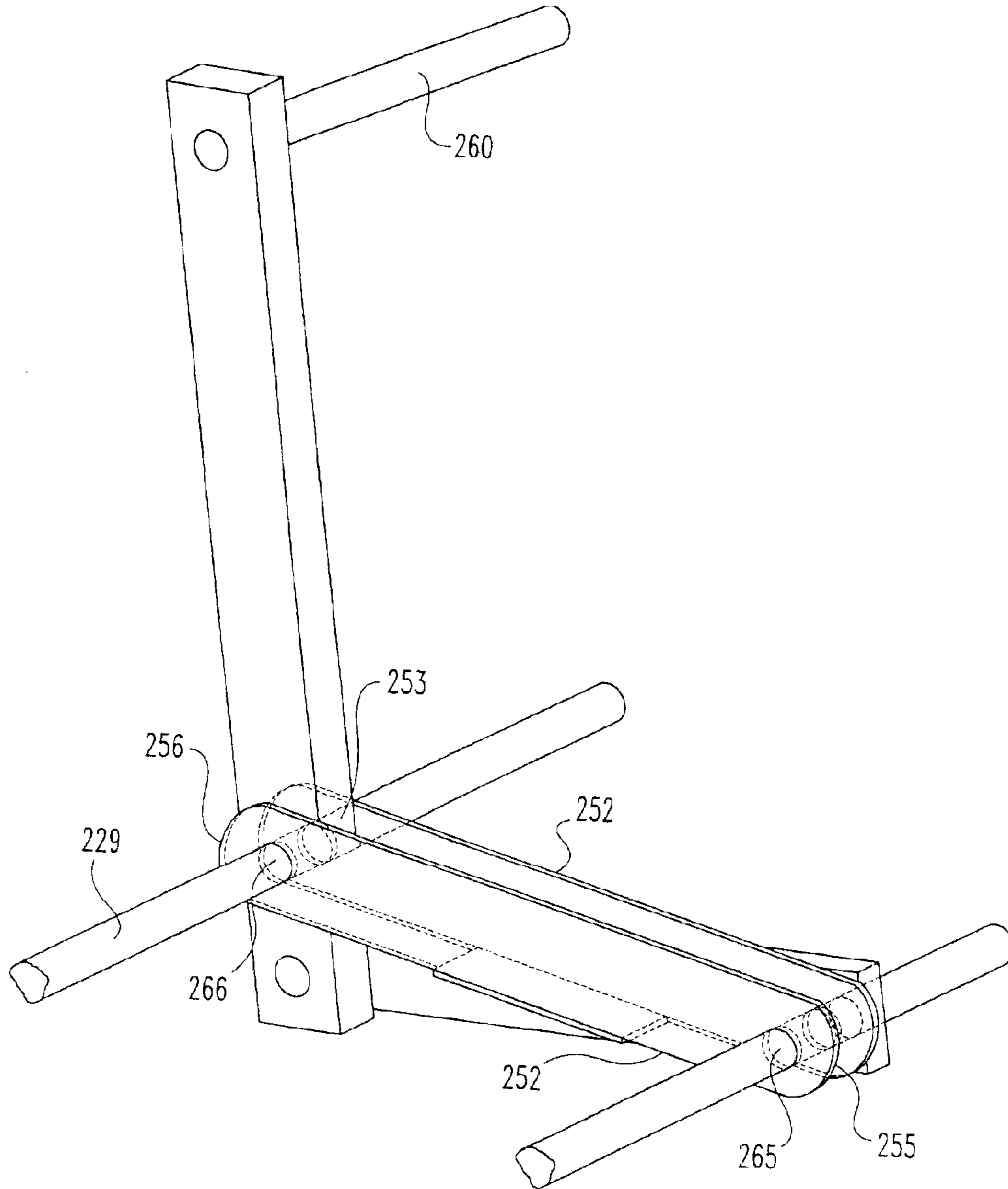


Fig. 7

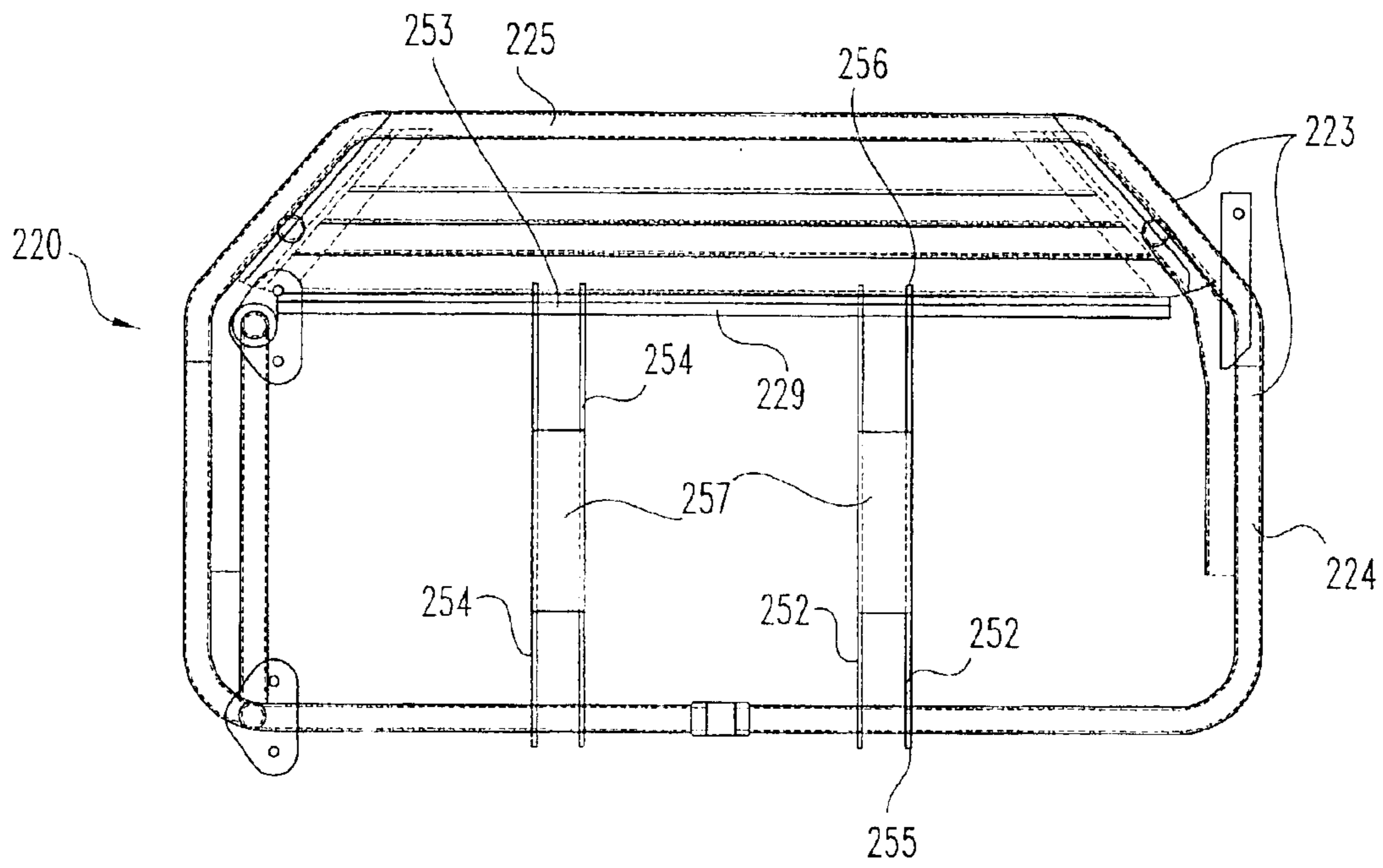


Fig. 8

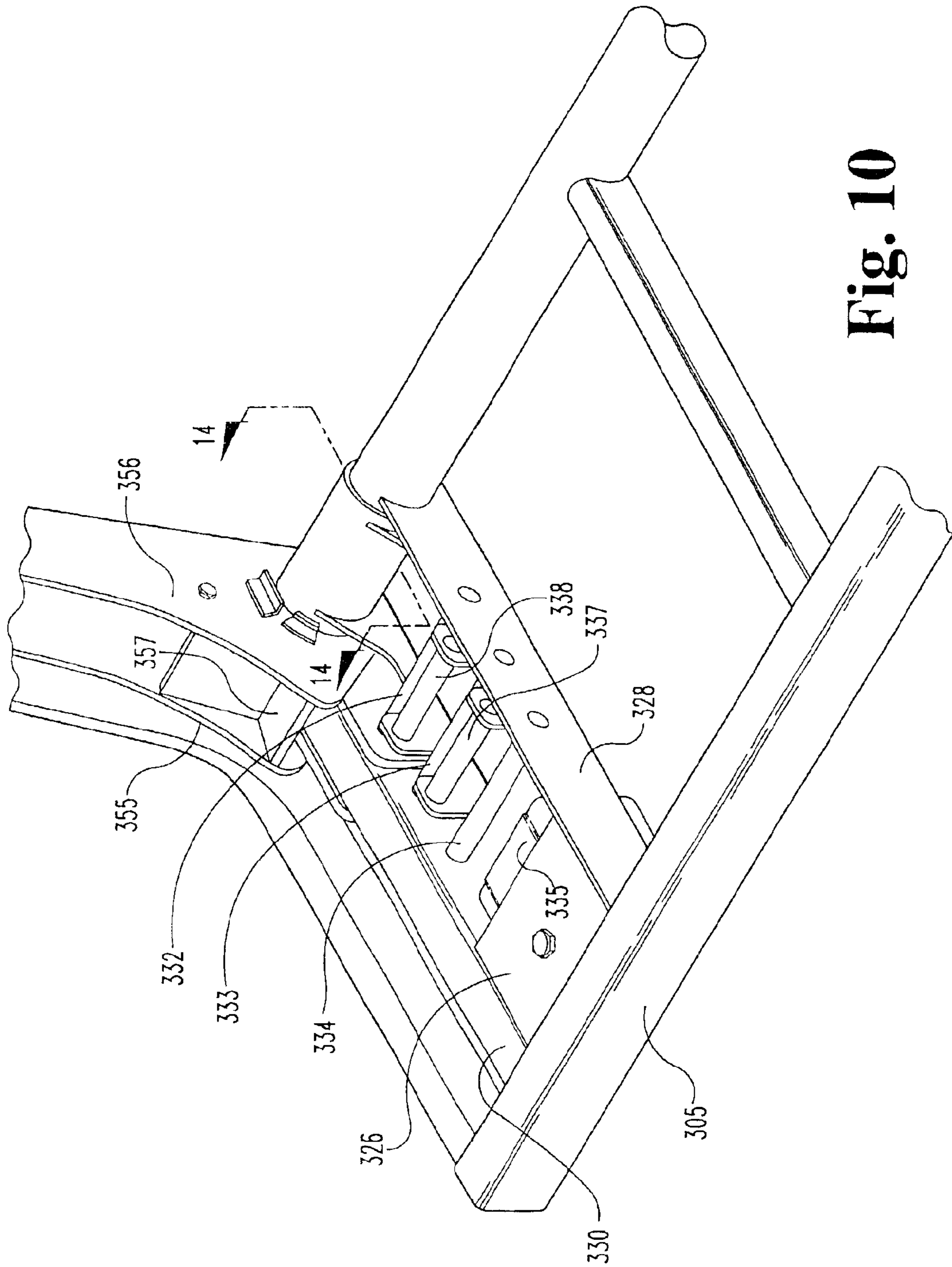


Fig. 10

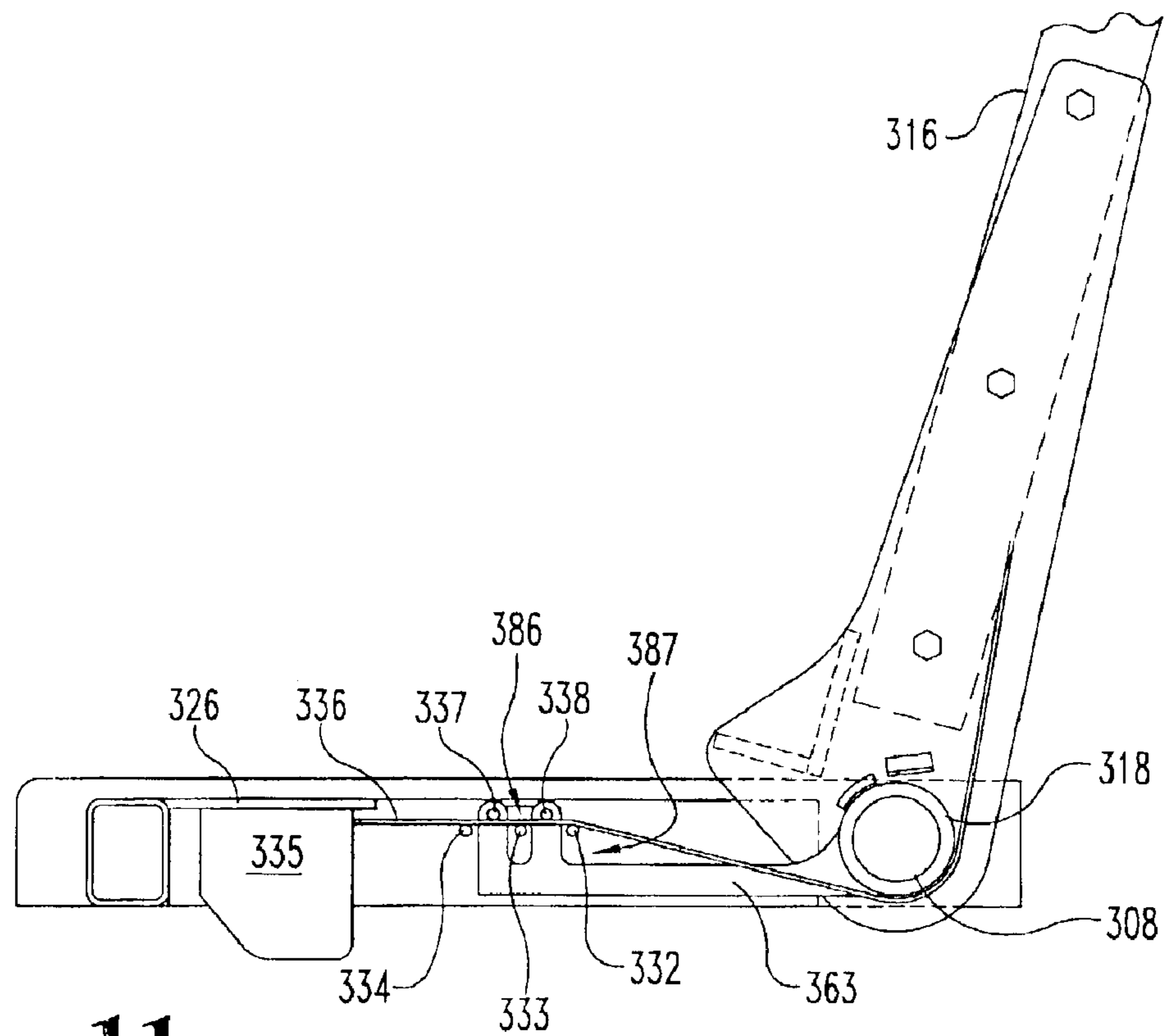


Fig. 11

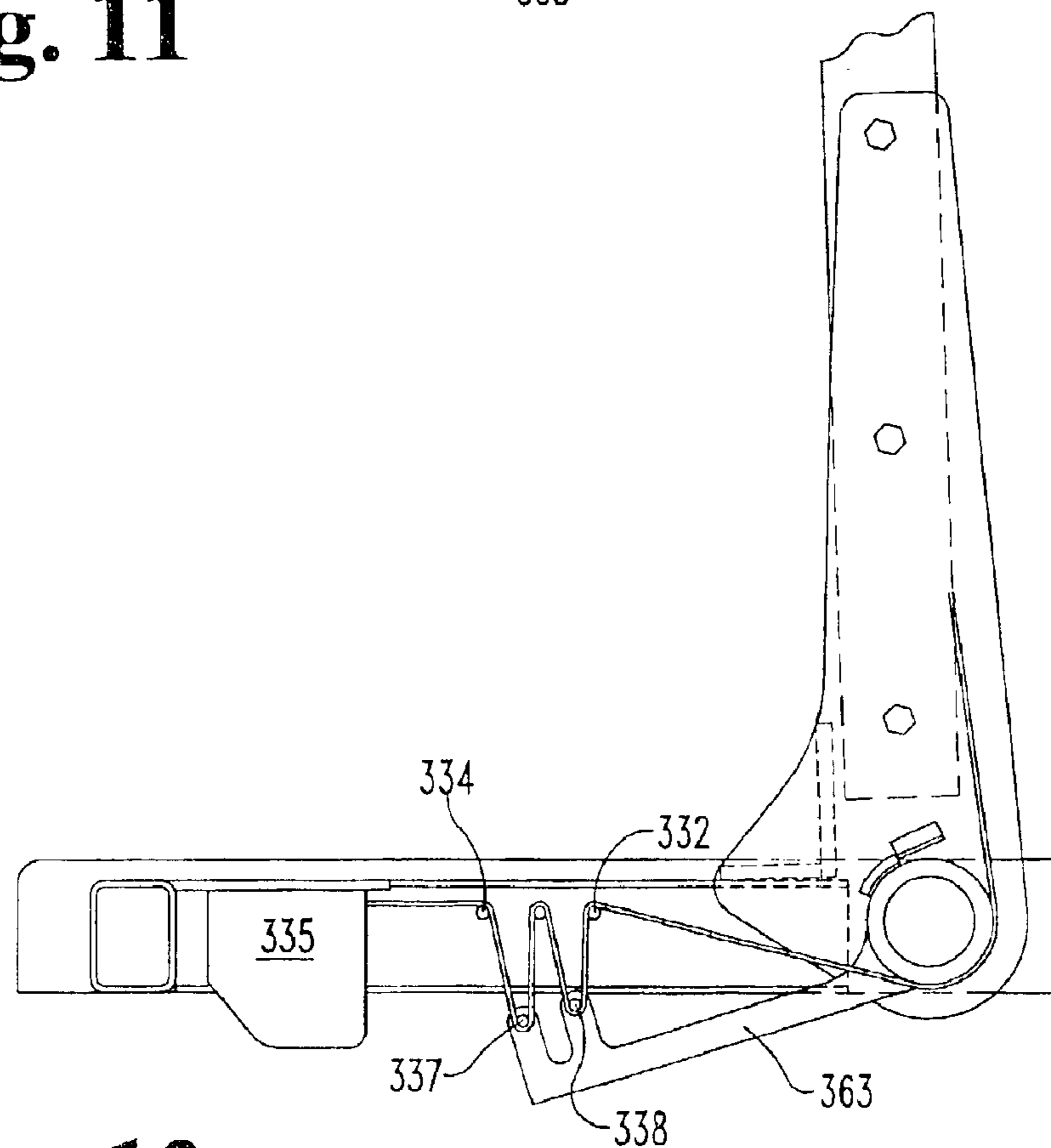


Fig. 12

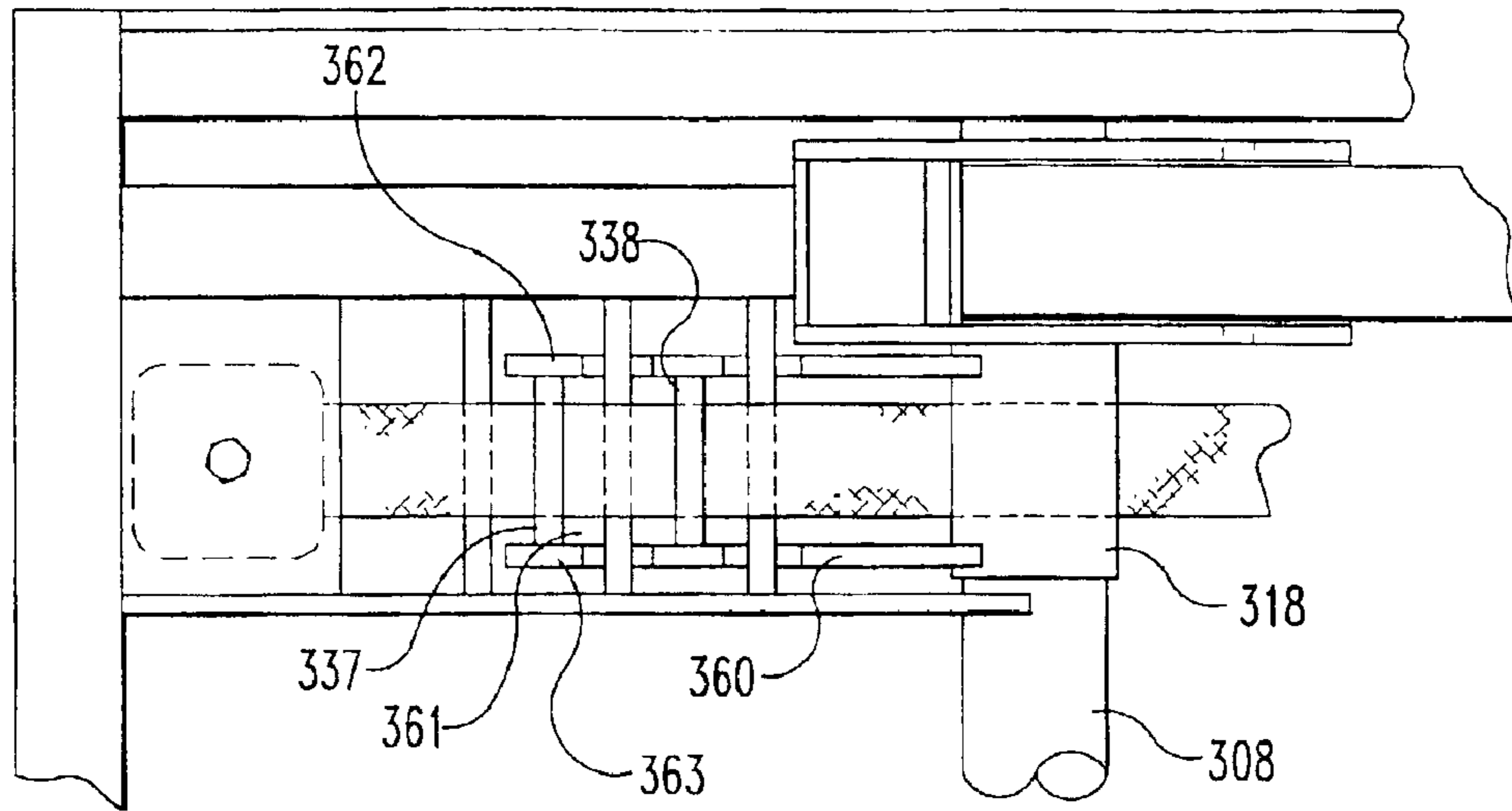


Fig. 13

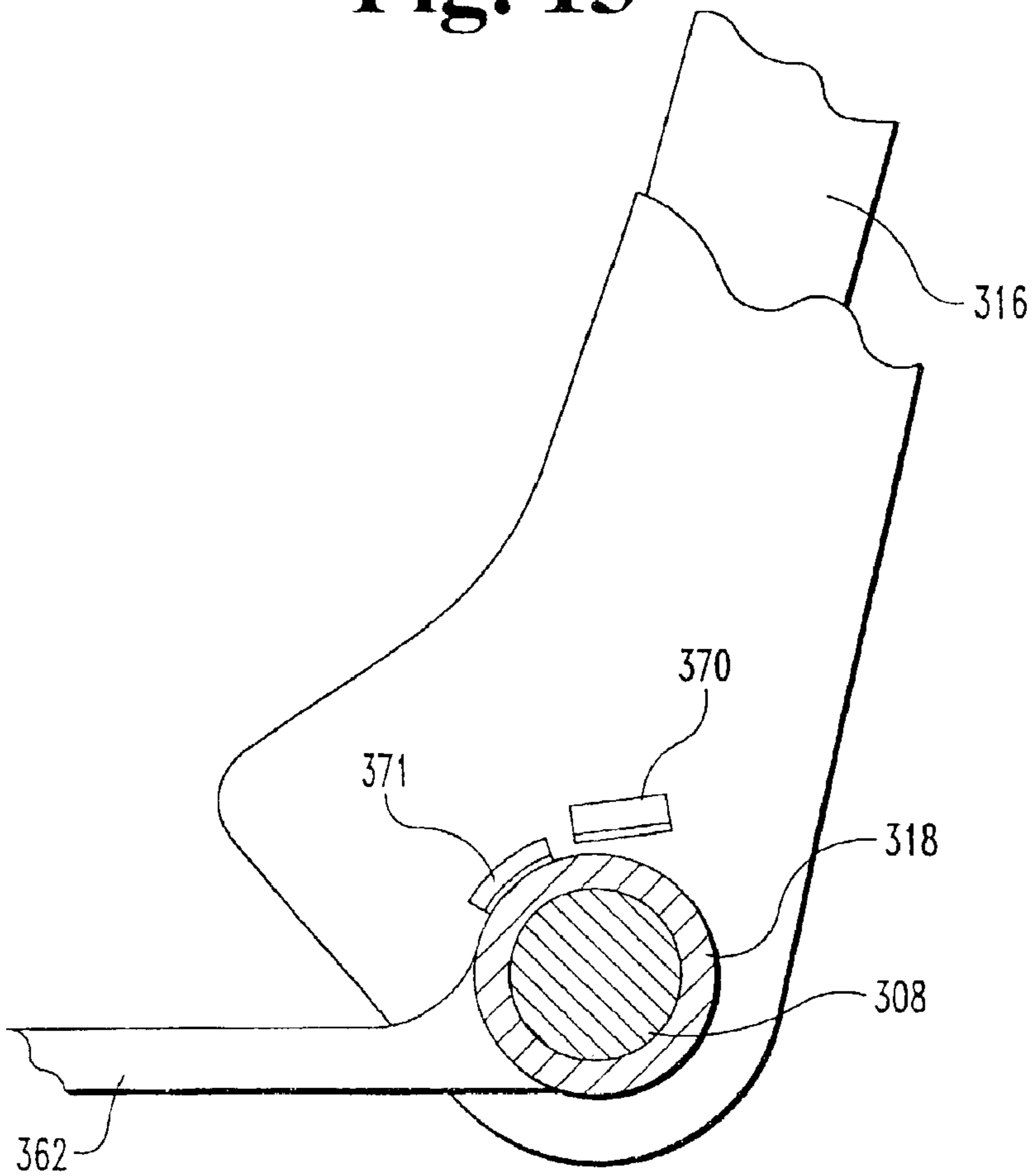


Fig. 14

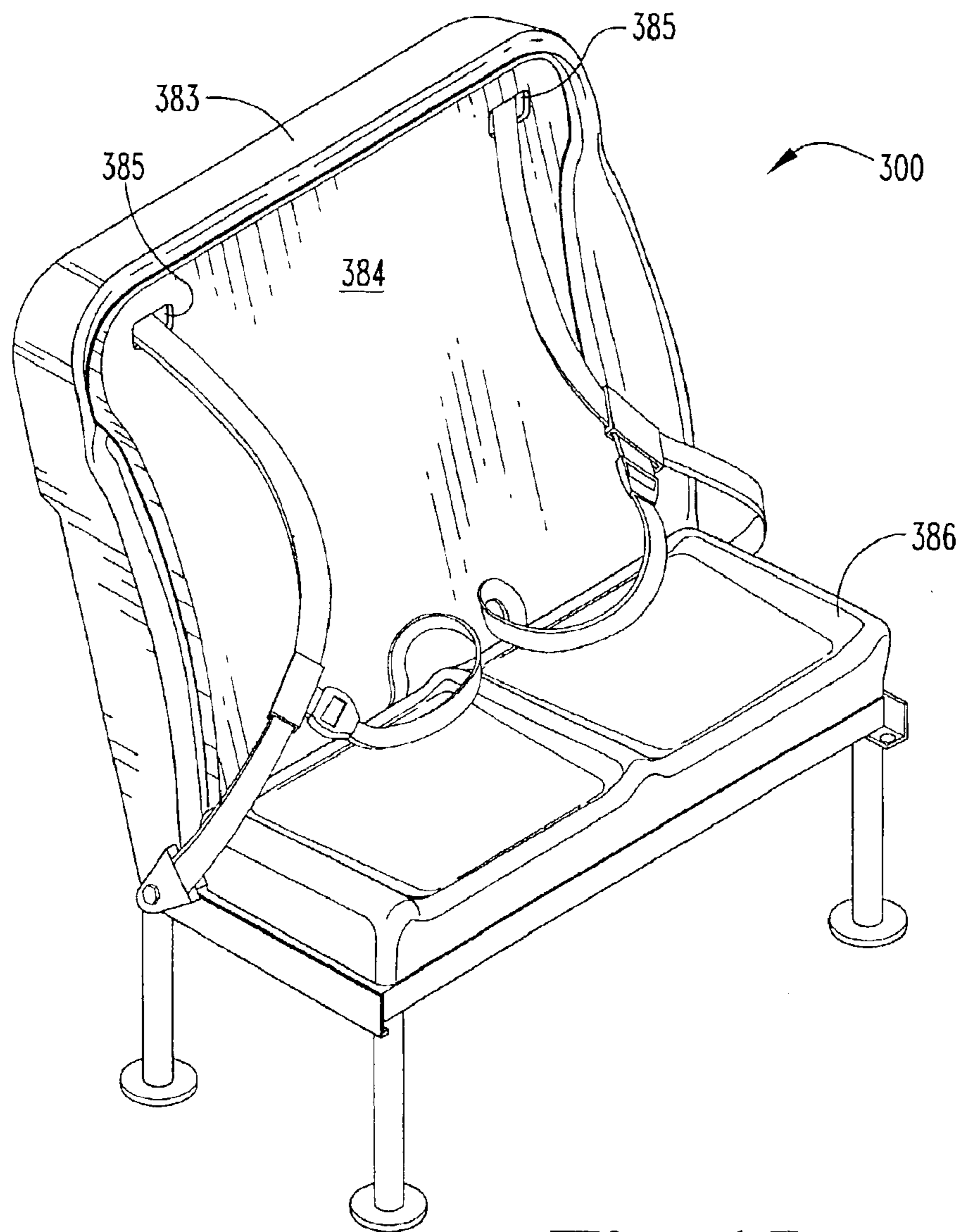


Fig. 15

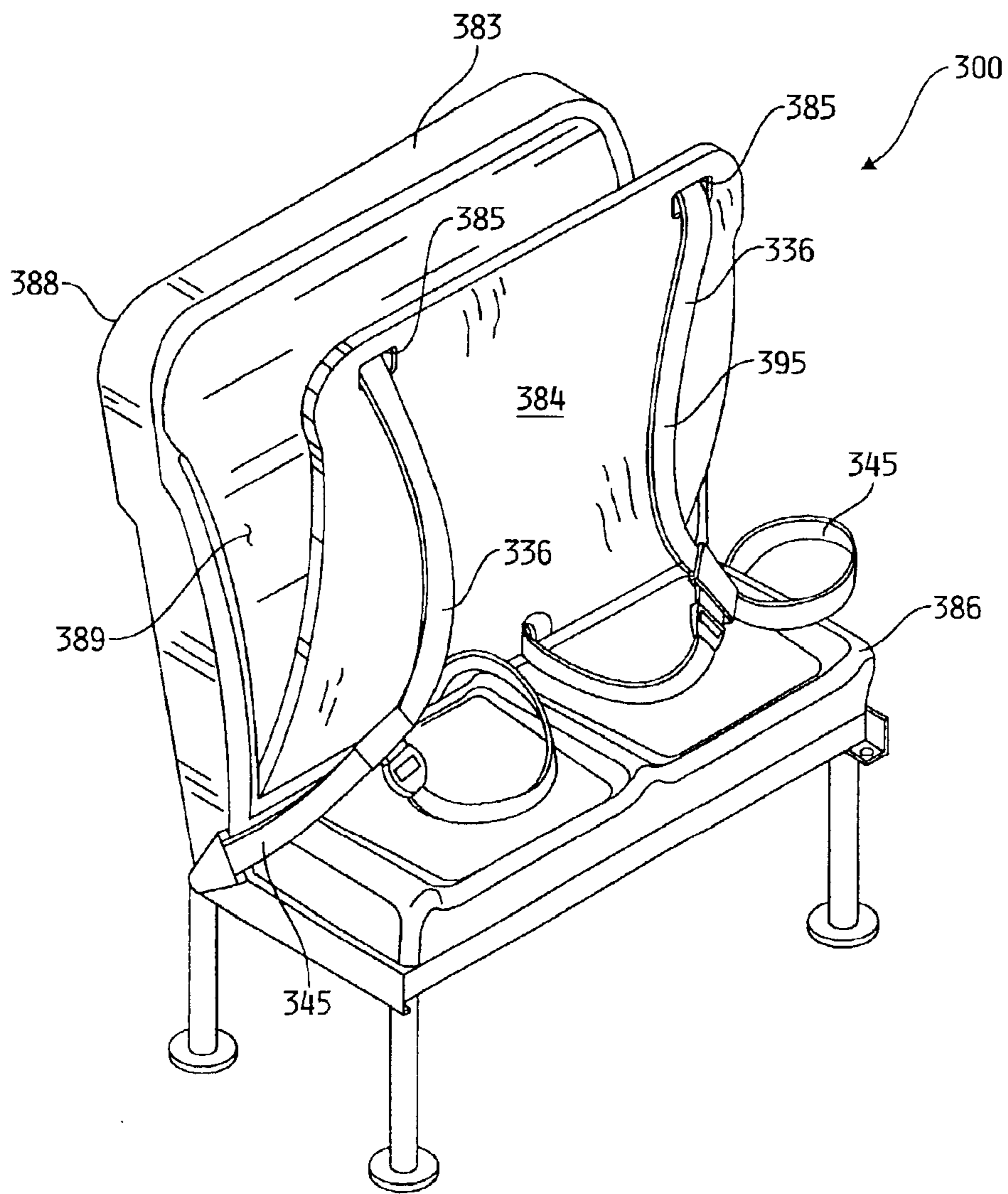


Fig. 16

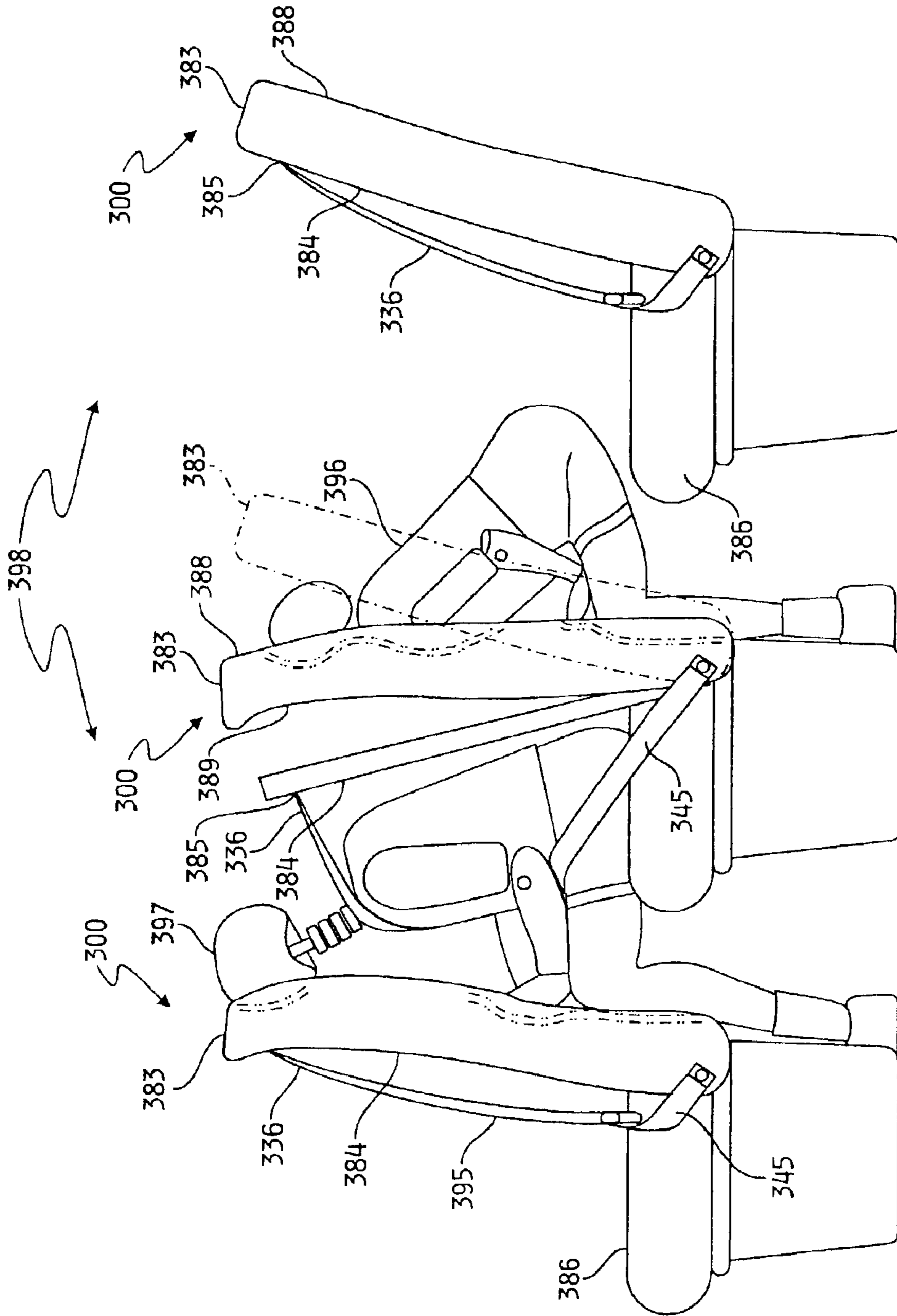


Fig. 17

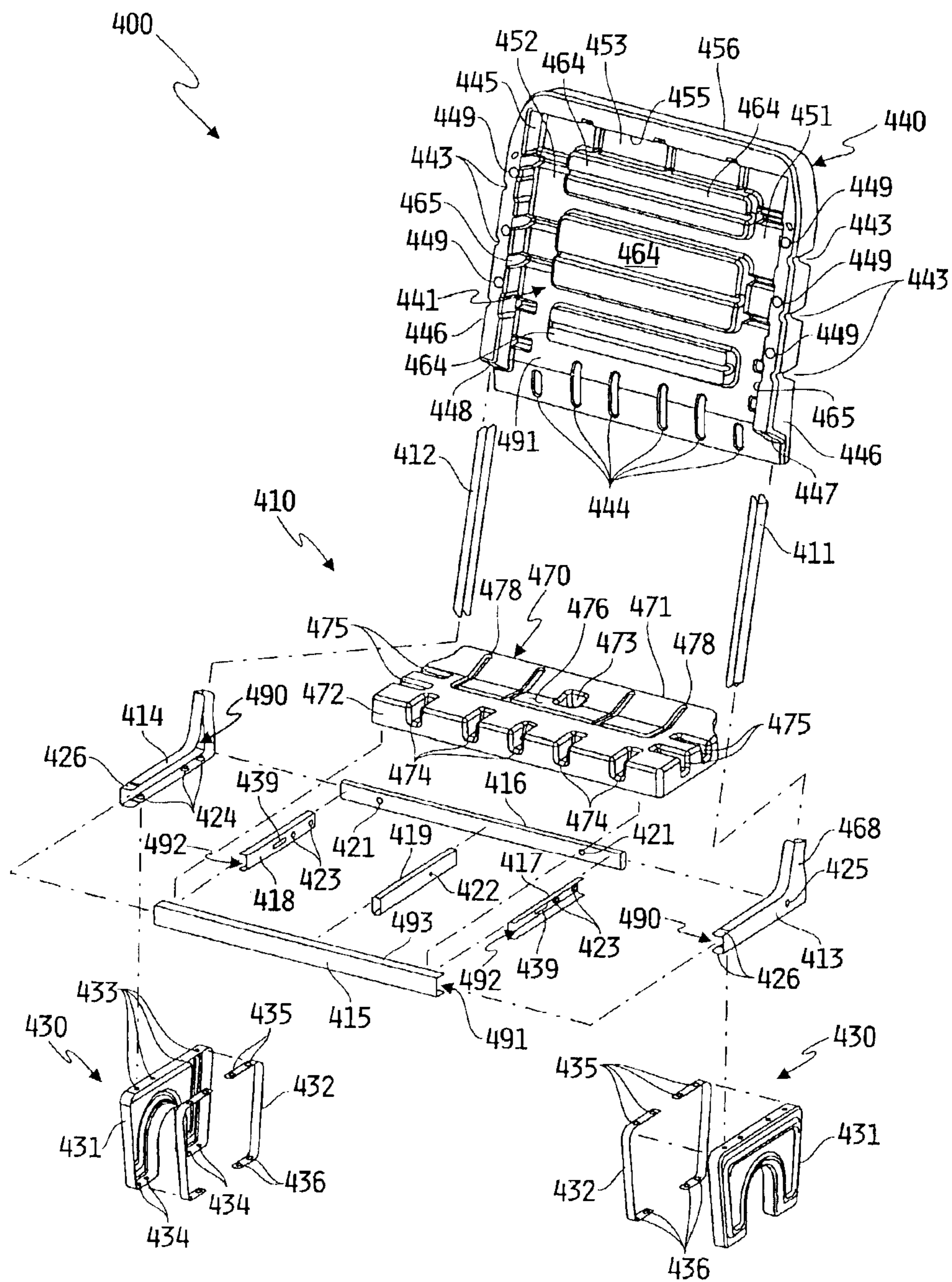


FIG. 18

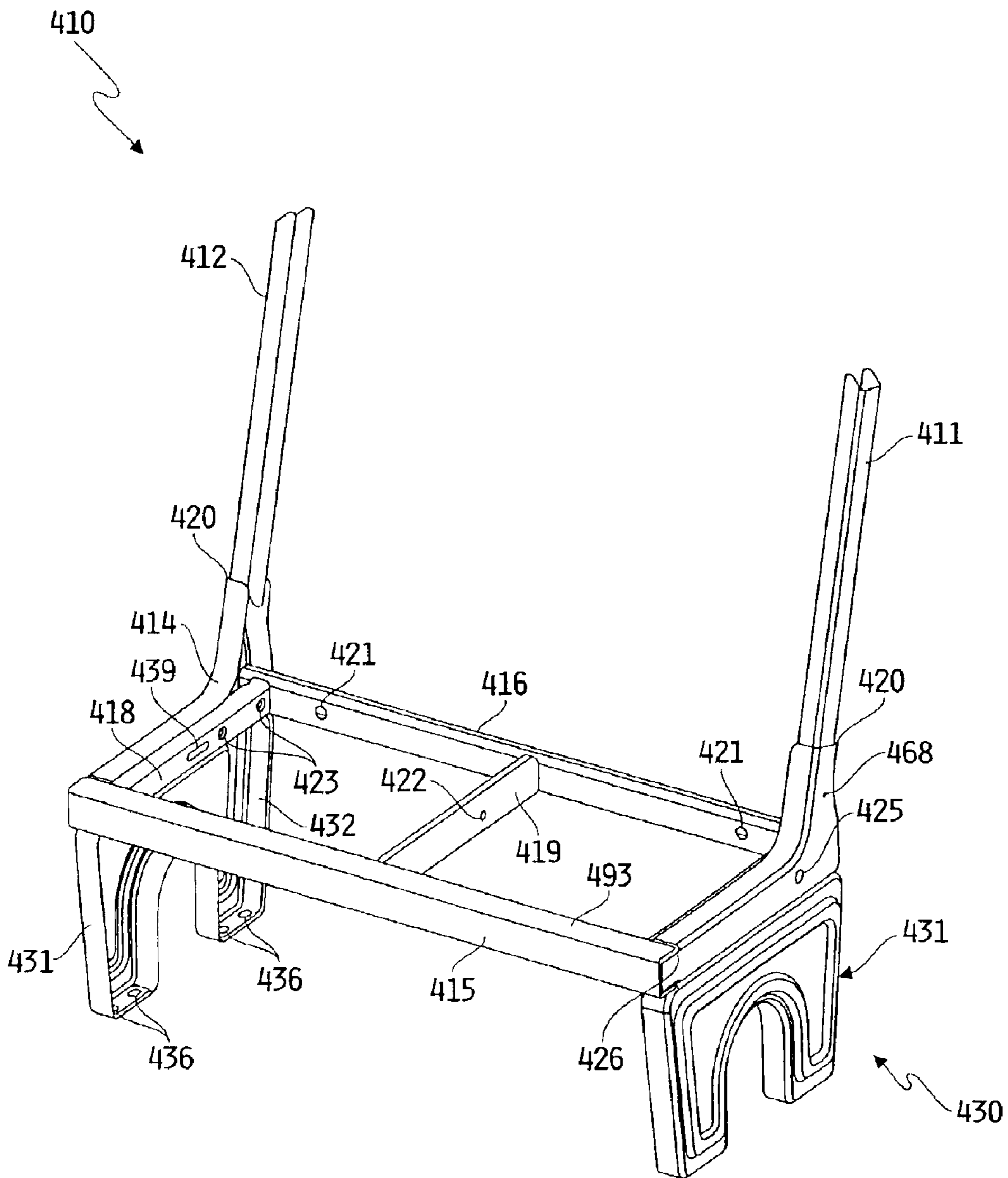


FIG. 19

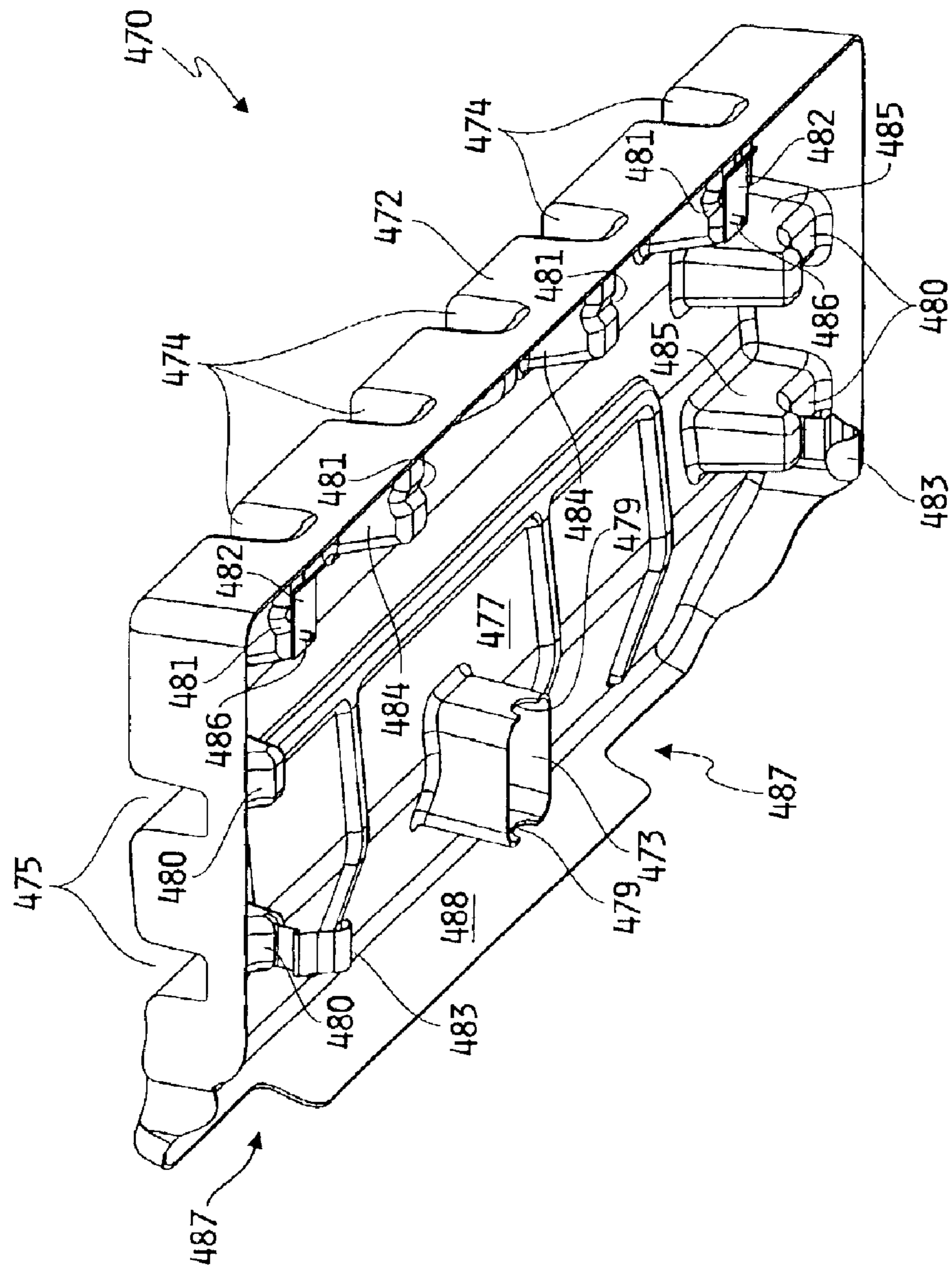


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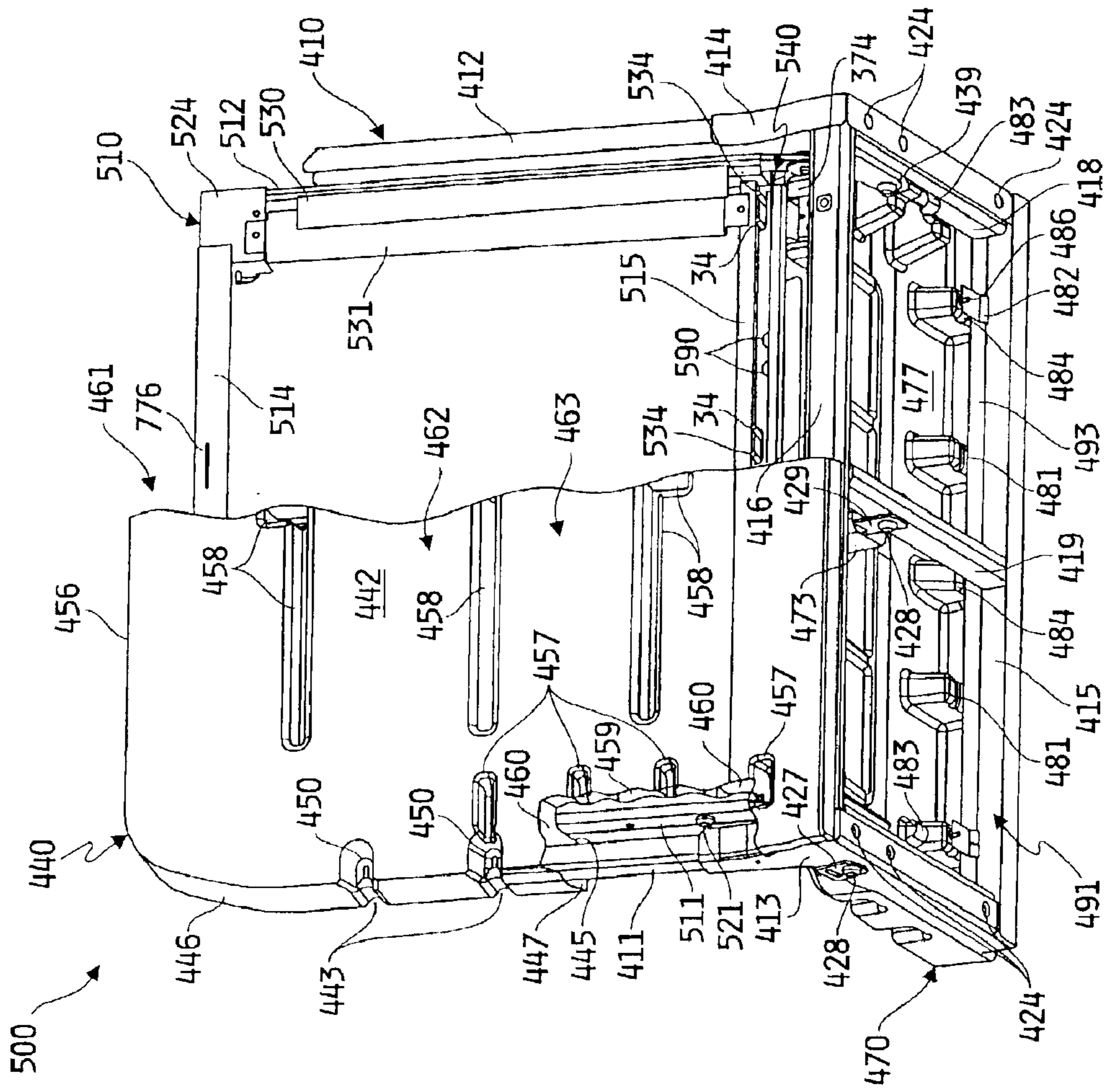


FIG. 21

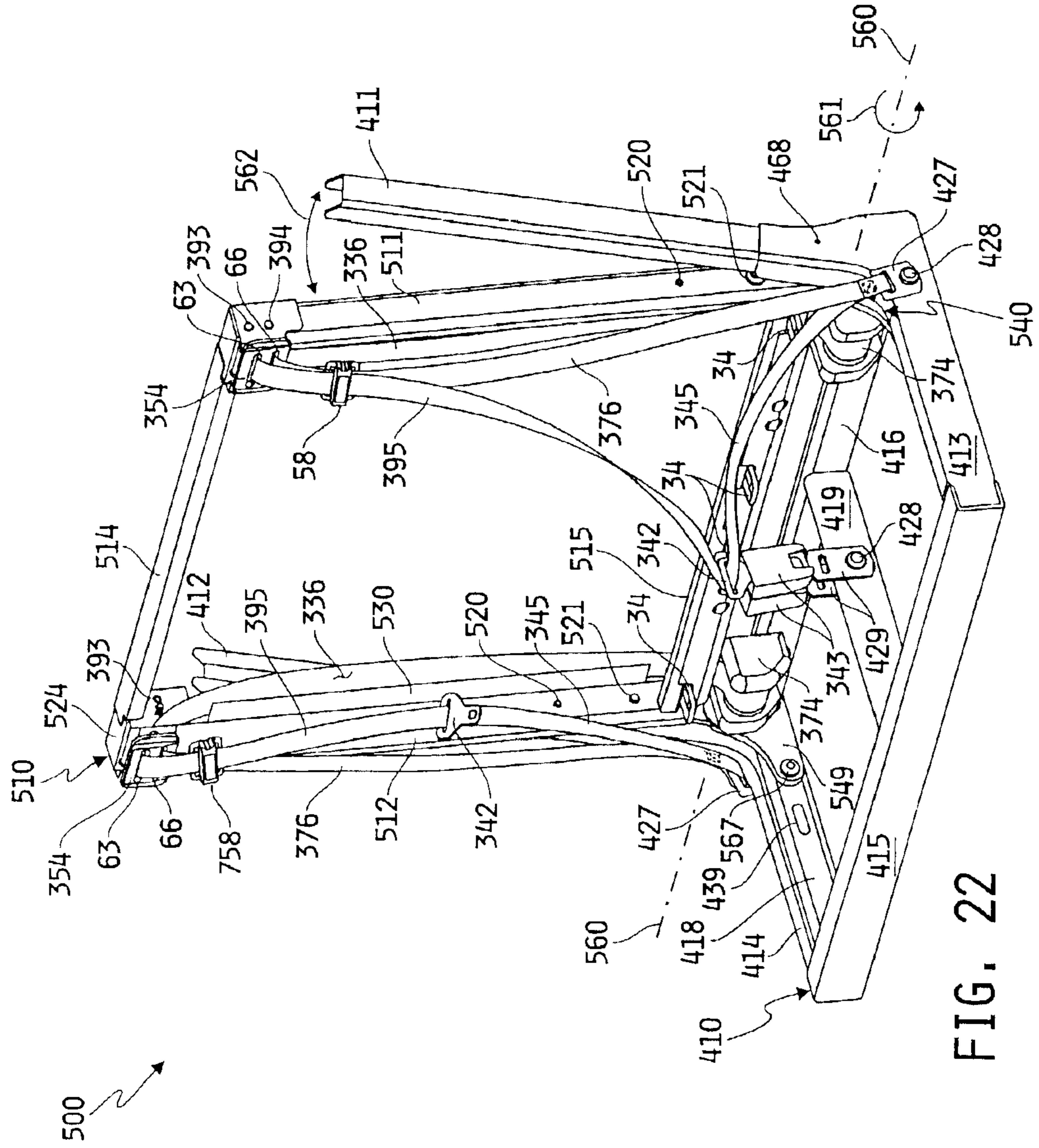


FIG. 22

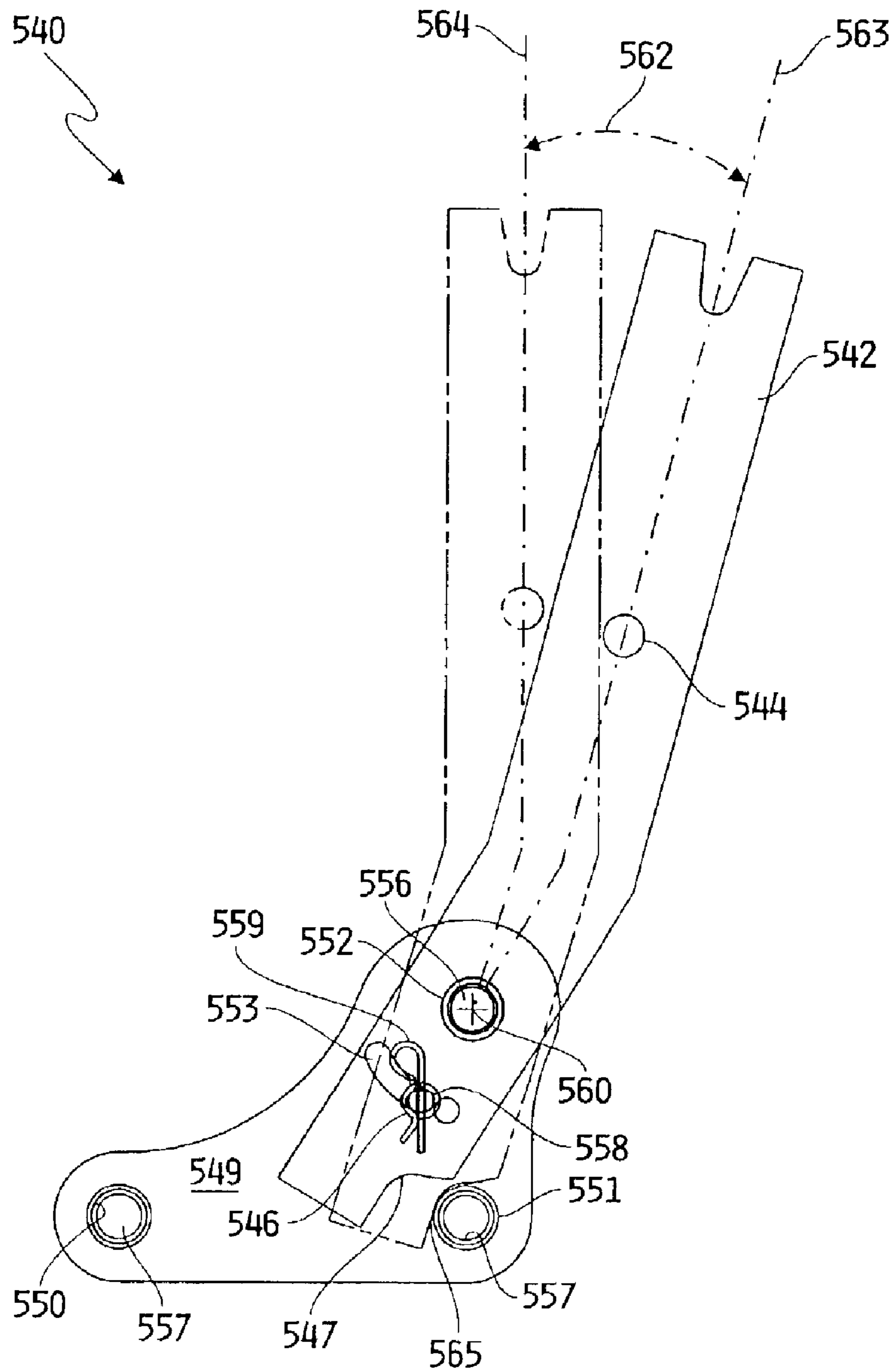


FIG. 23

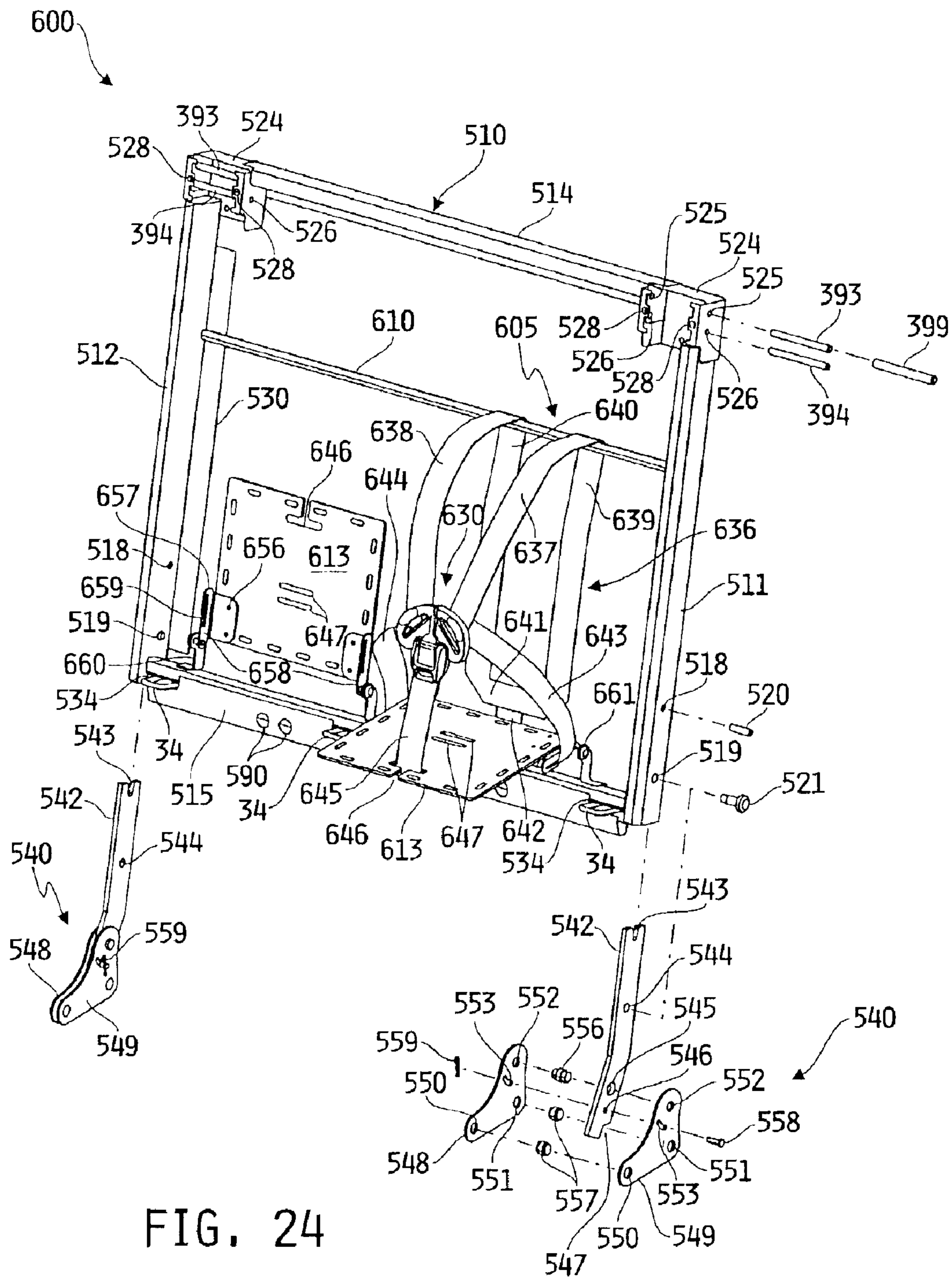


FIG. 24

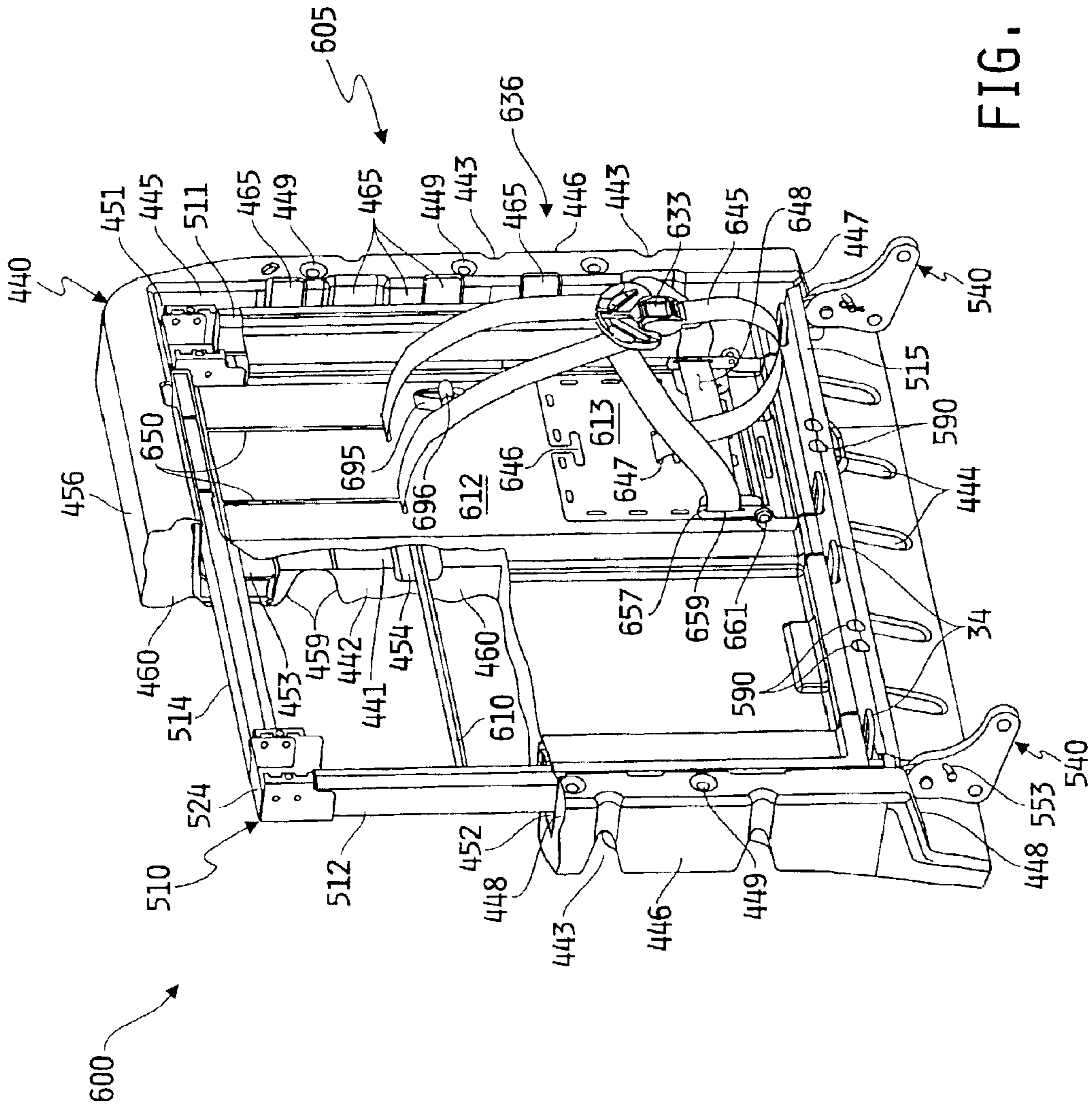


FIG. 25

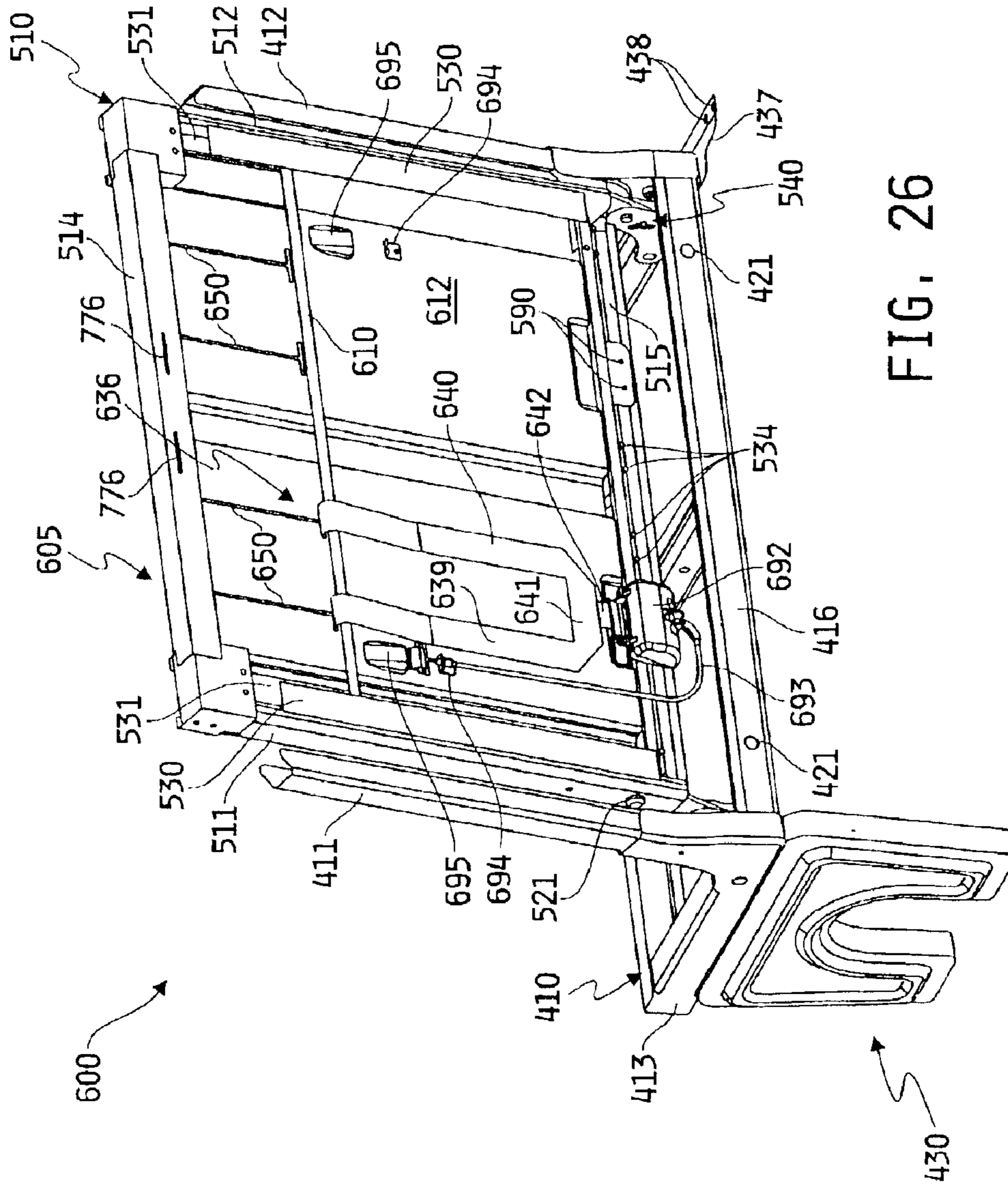


FIG. 26

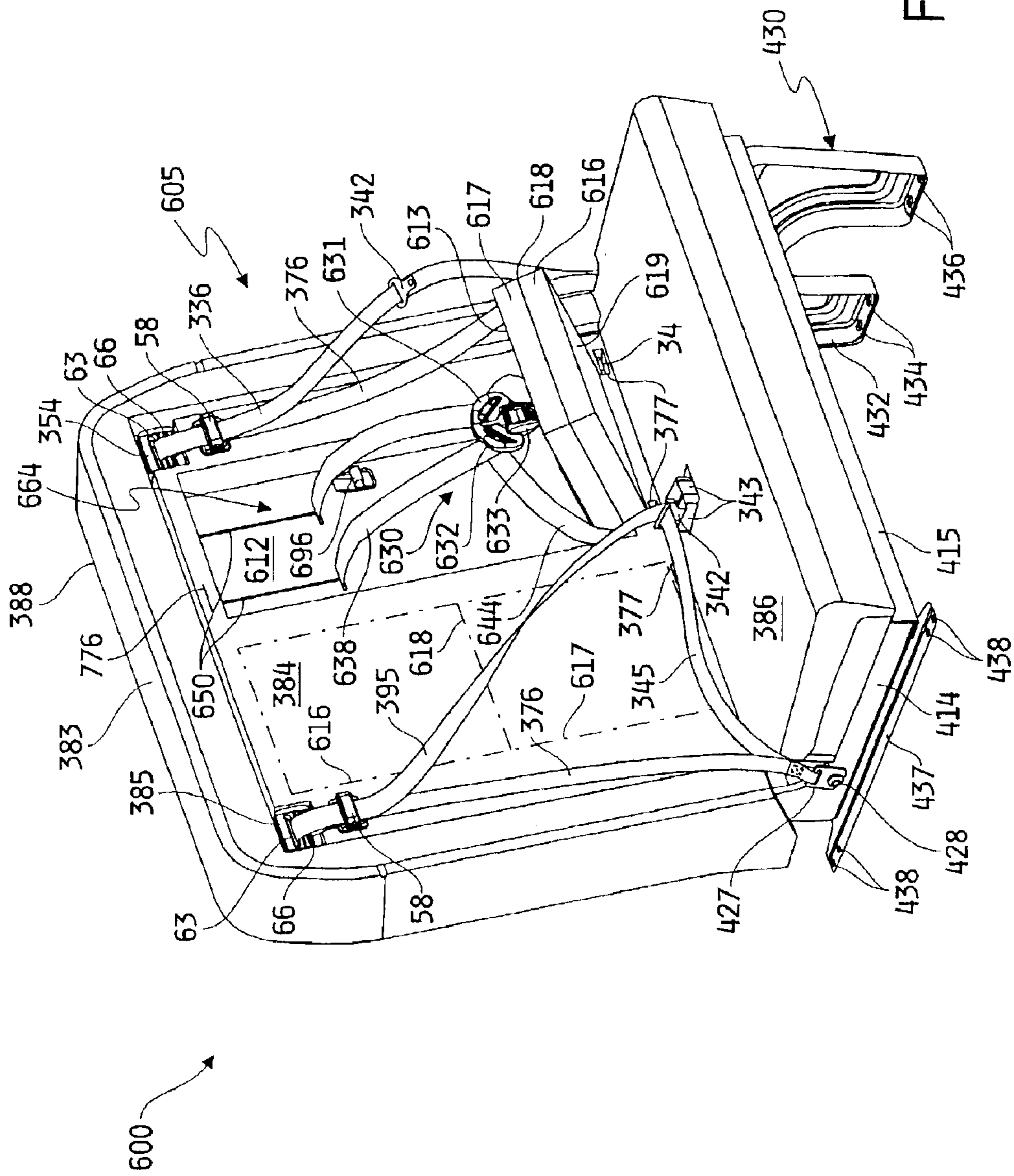


FIG. 27

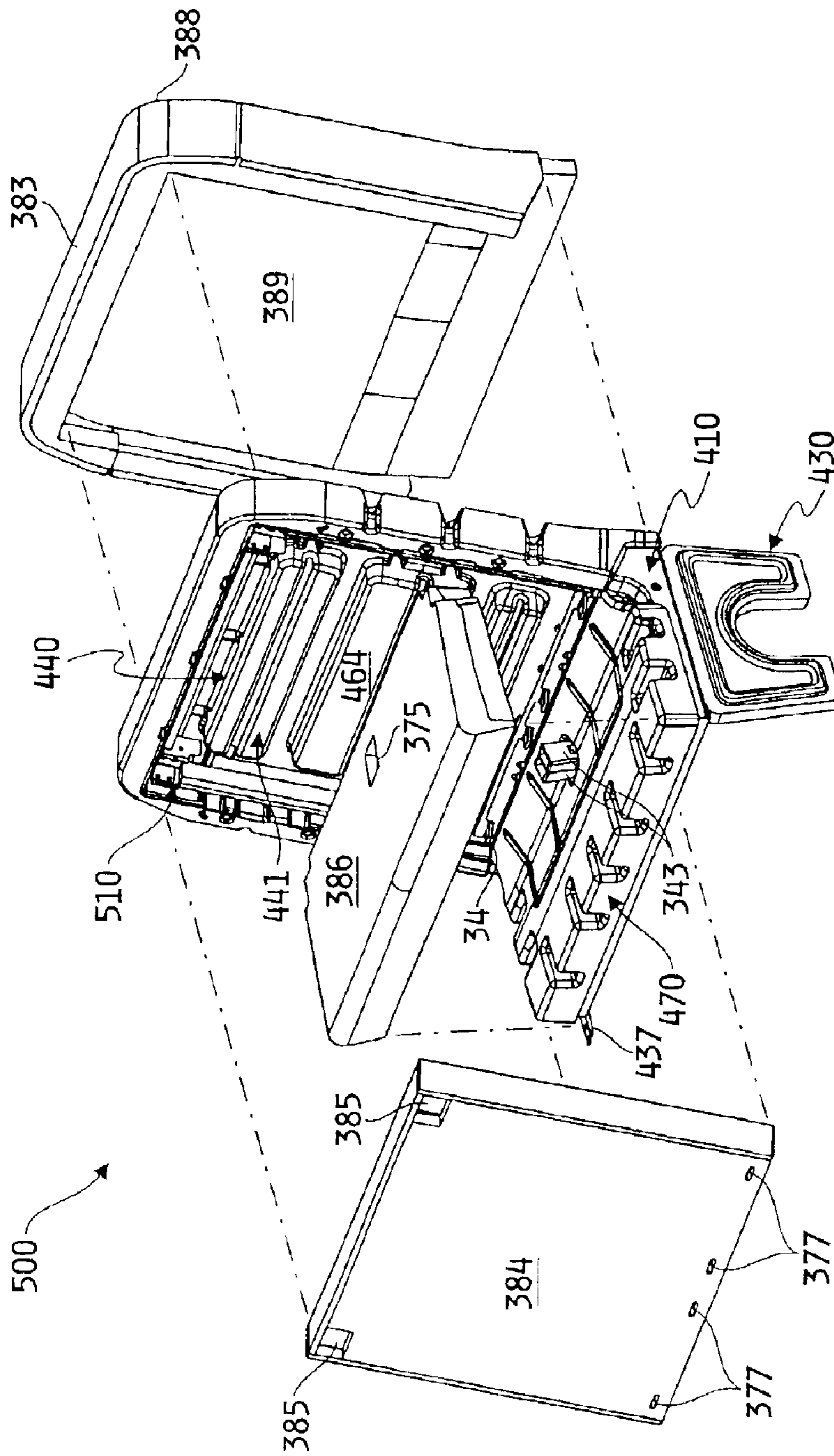


FIG. 28

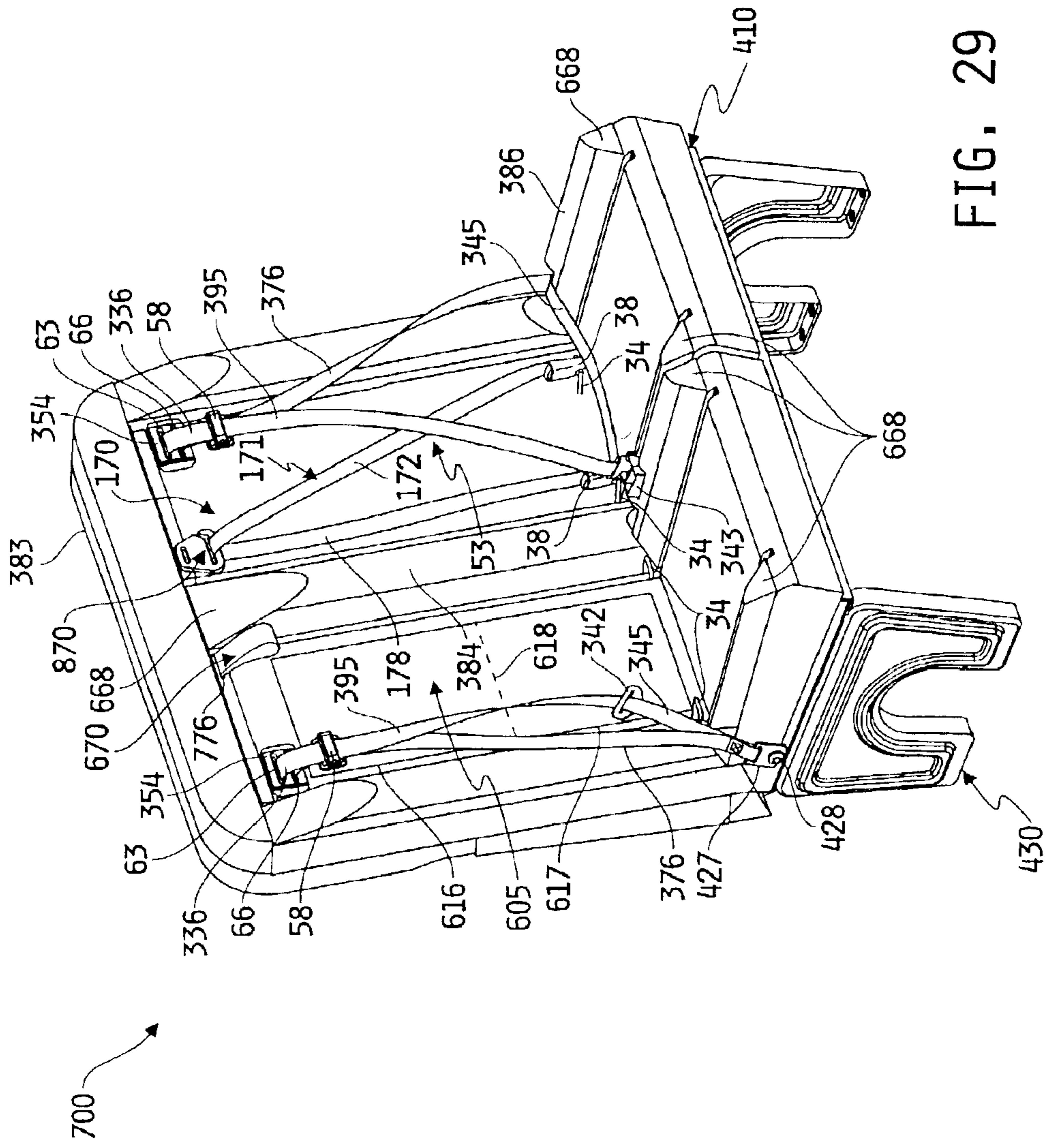


FIG. 29

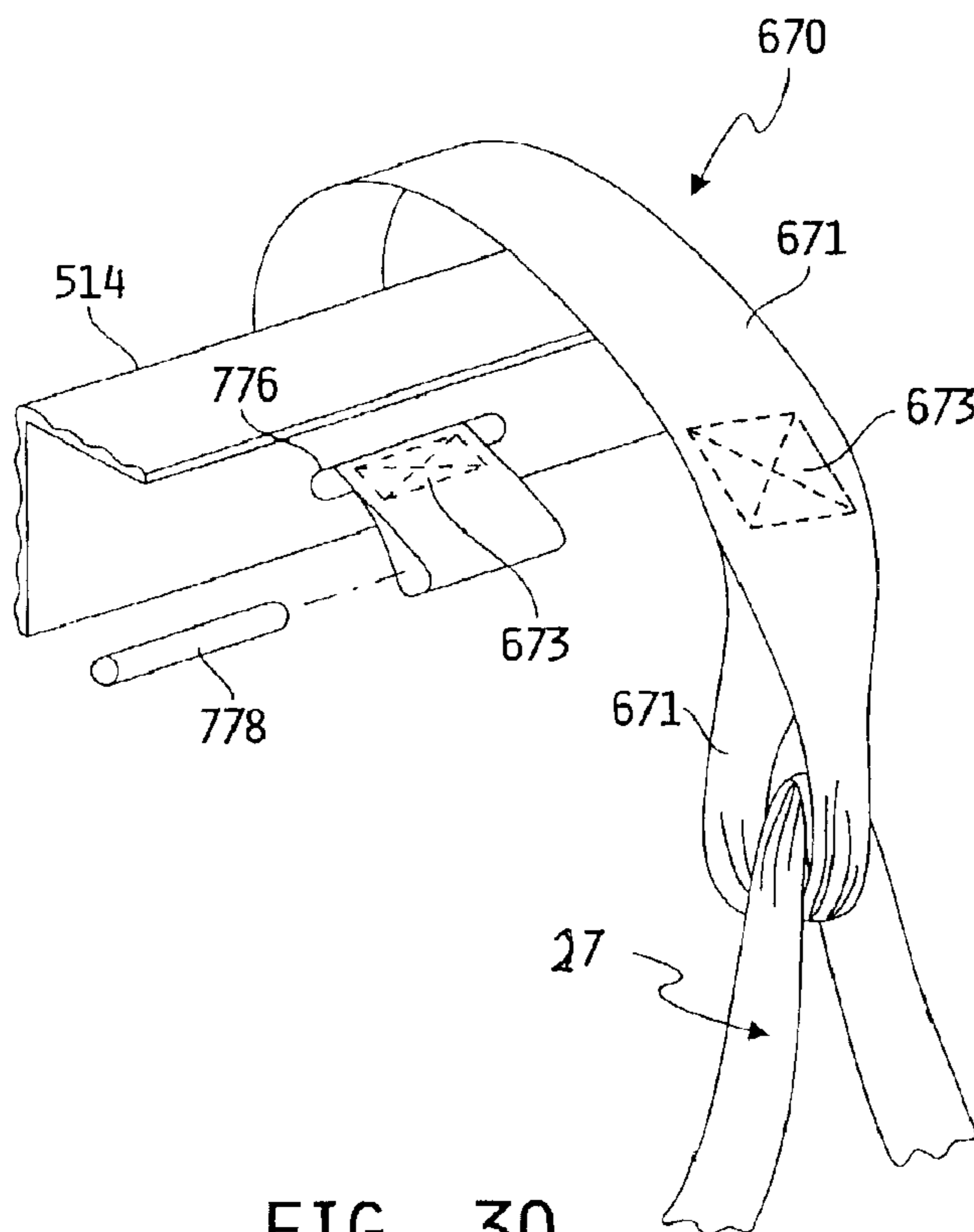


FIG. 30

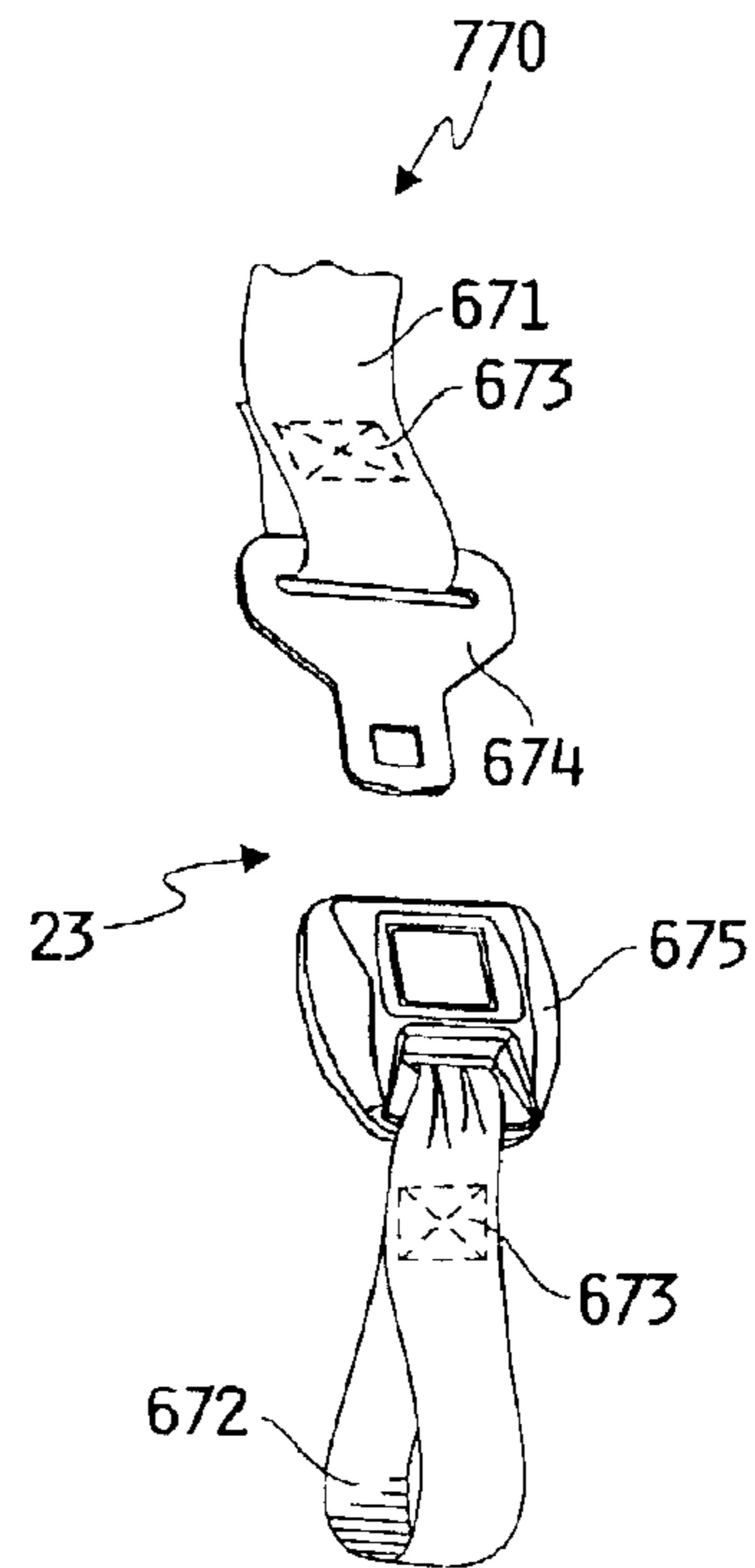


FIG. 31

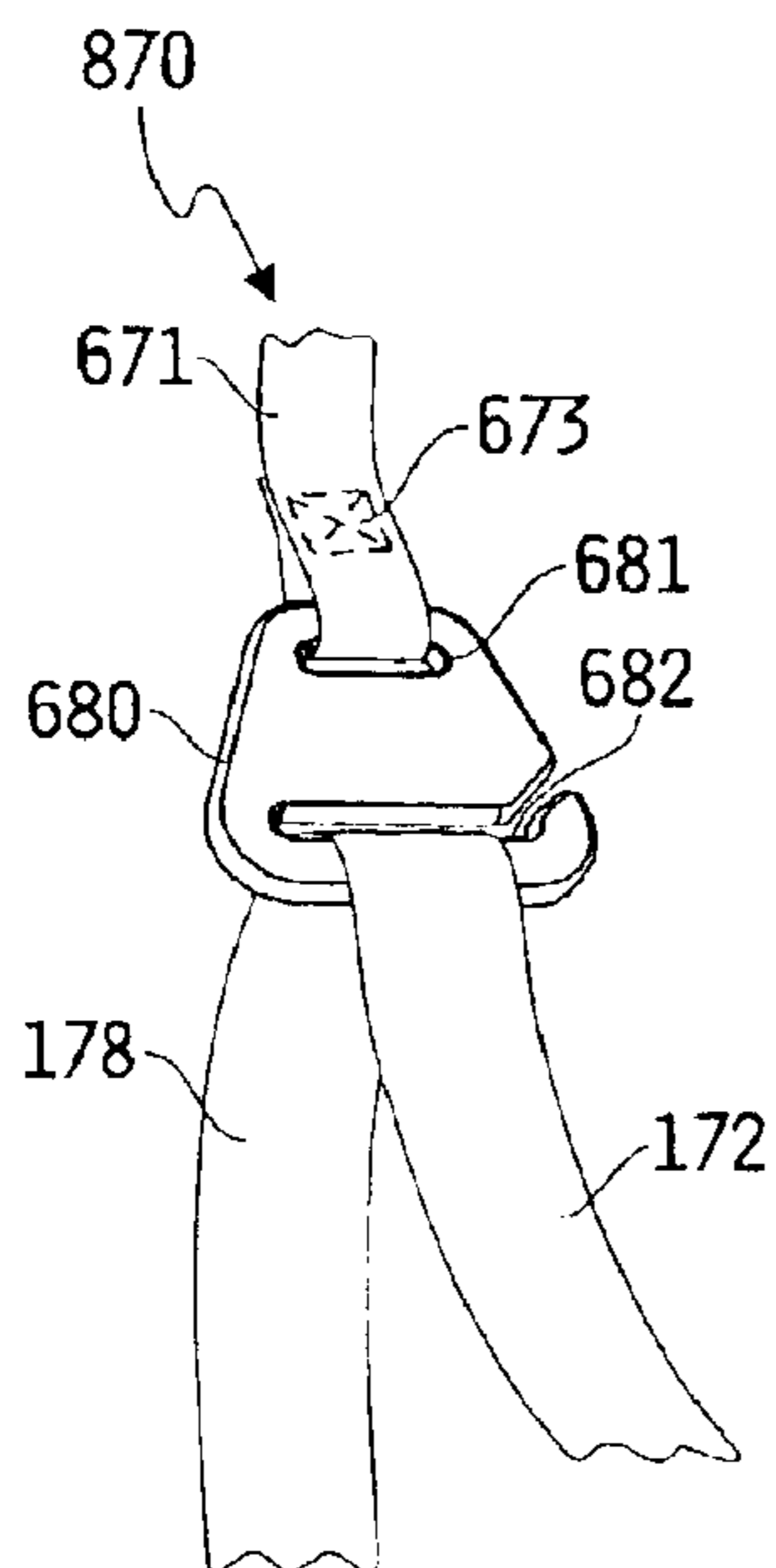


FIG. 32

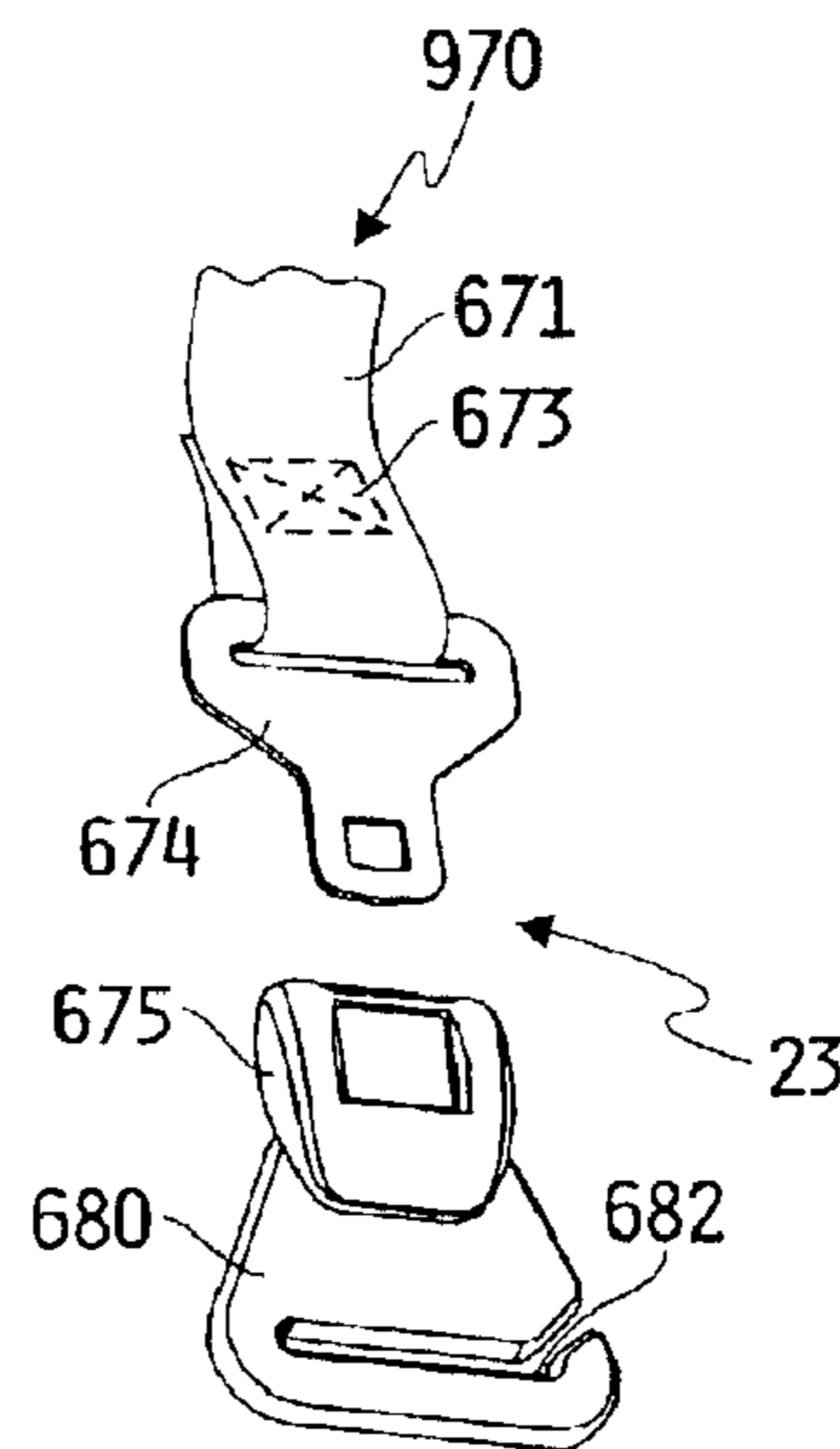


FIG. 33

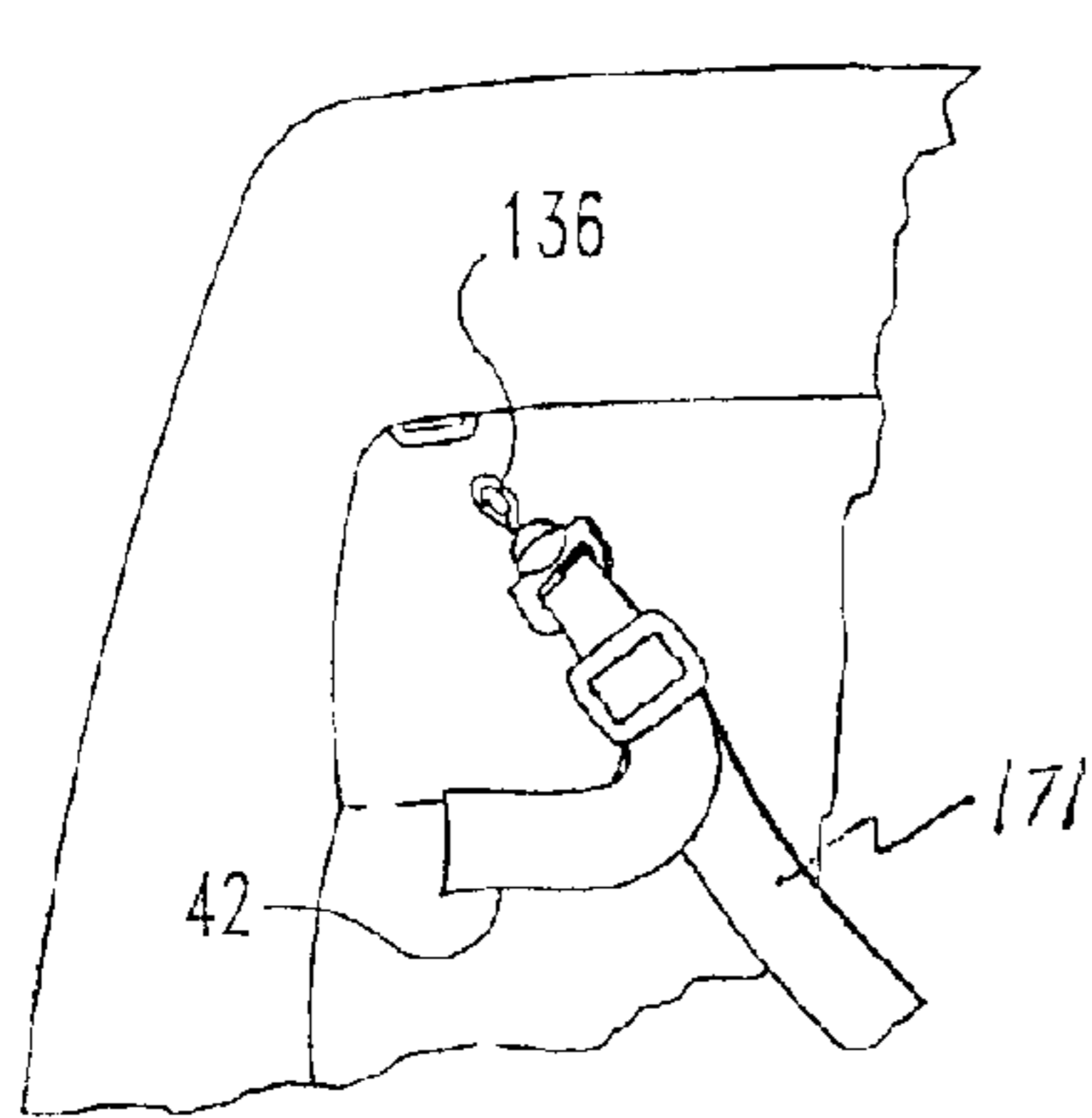


Fig. 34

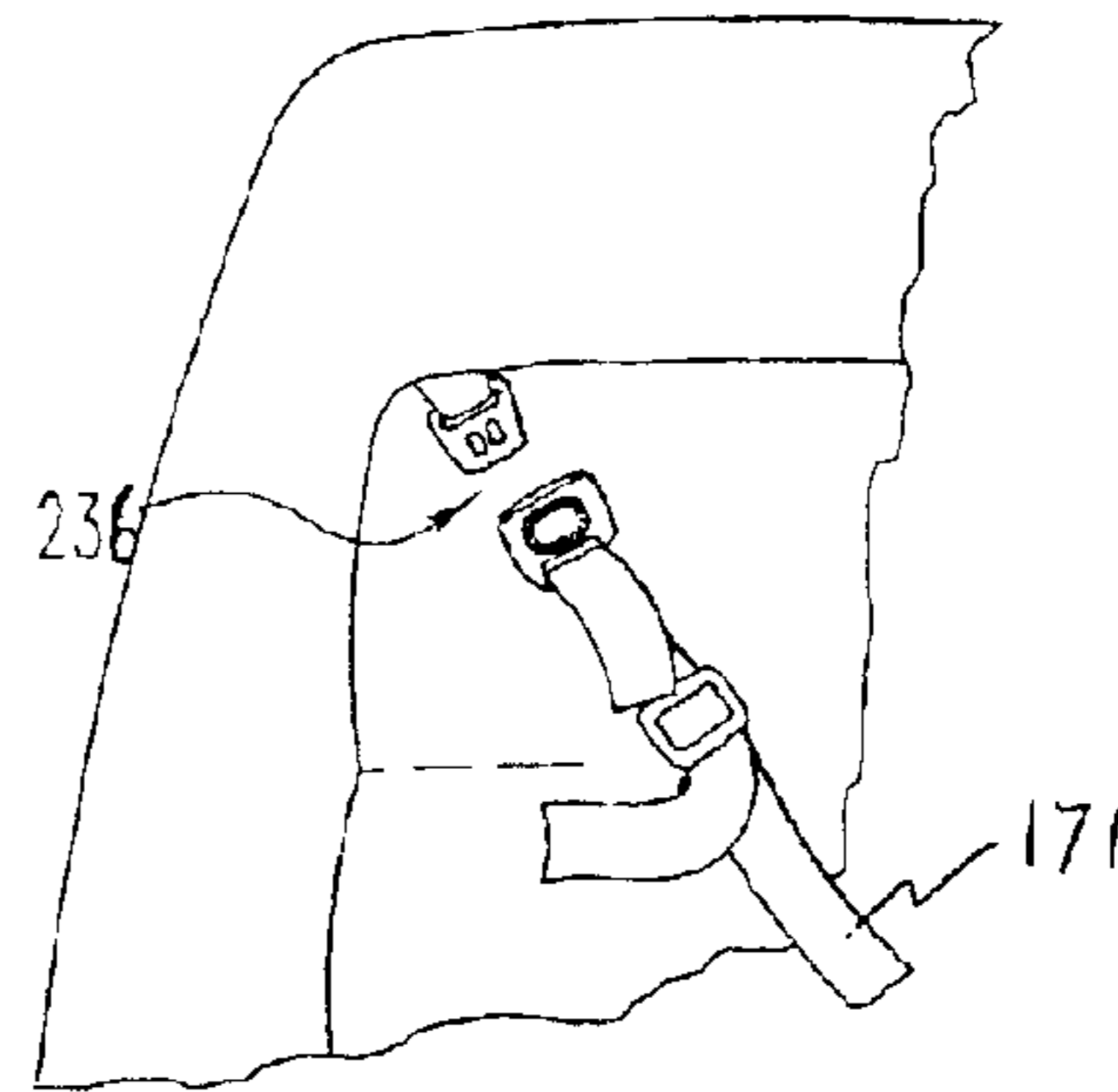


Fig. 35

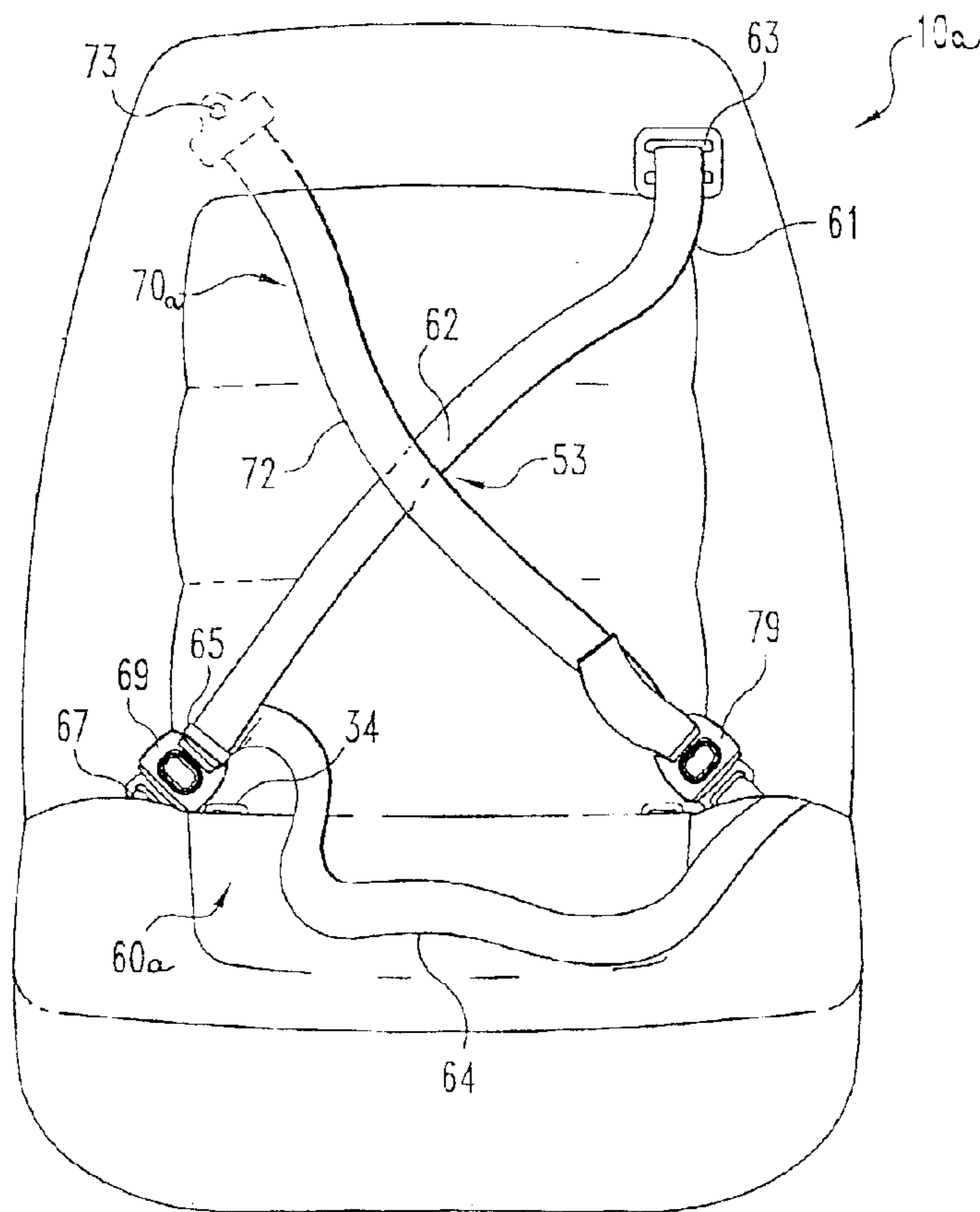


Fig. 36

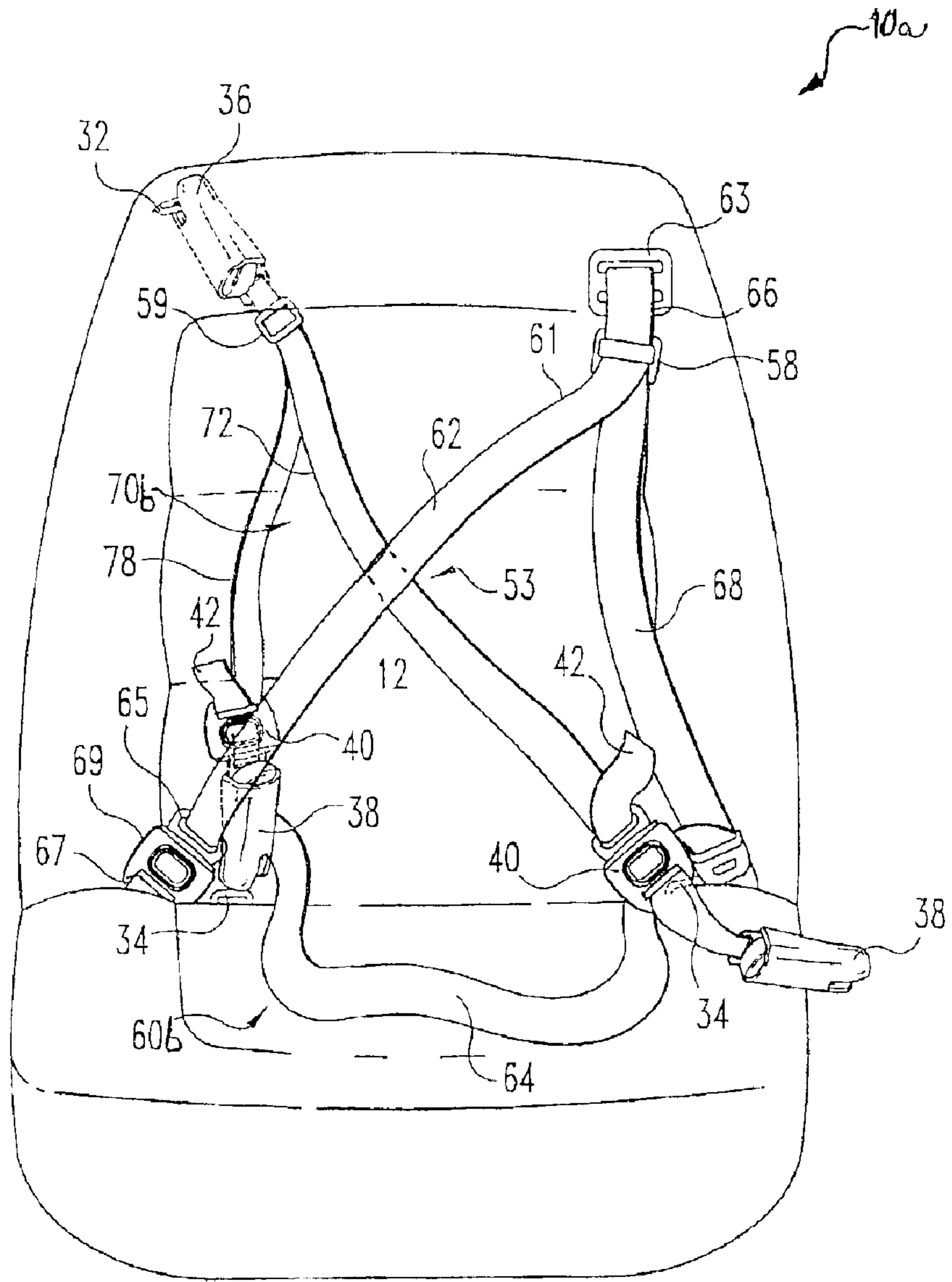


Fig.37

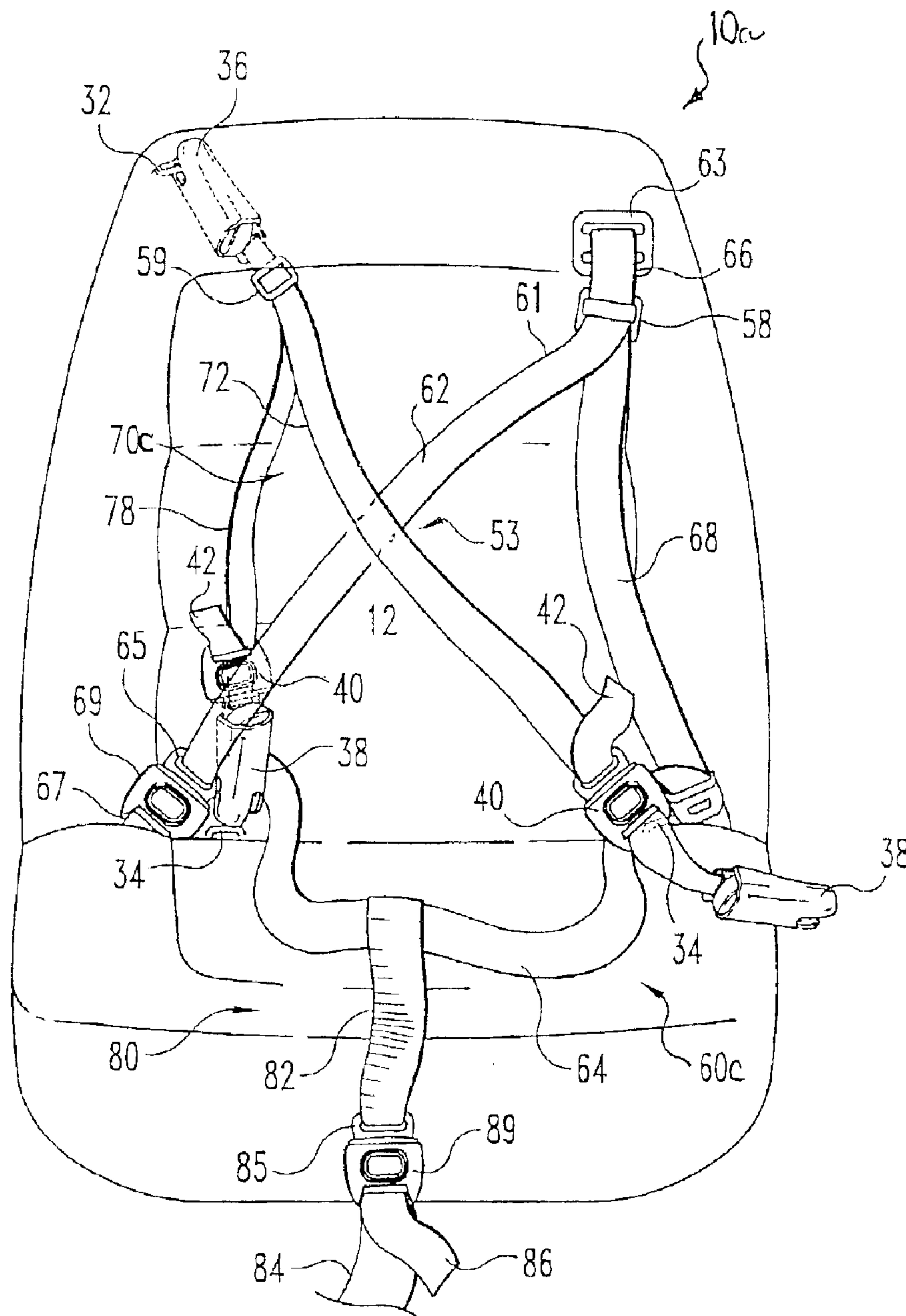


Fig.38

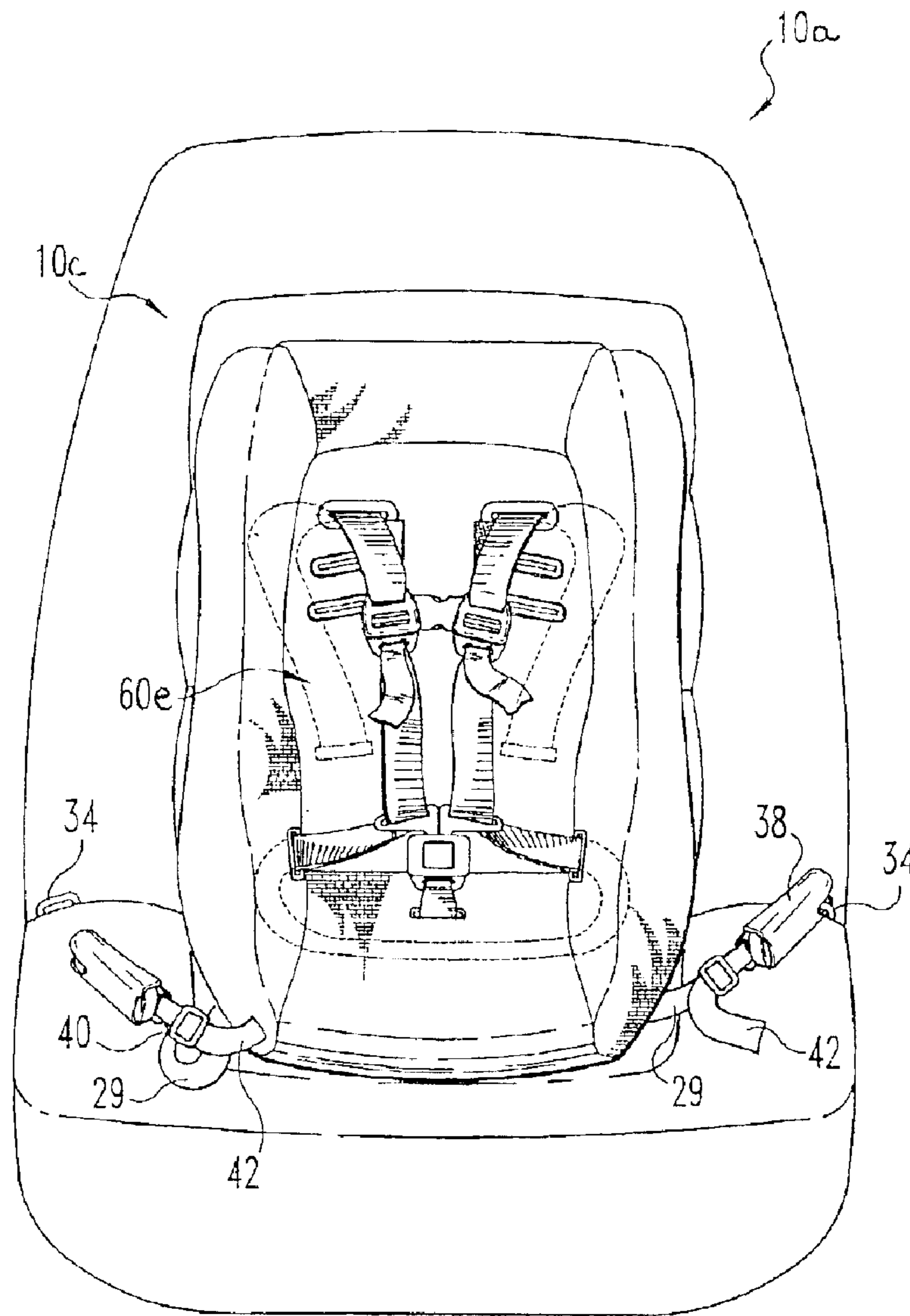


Fig.39

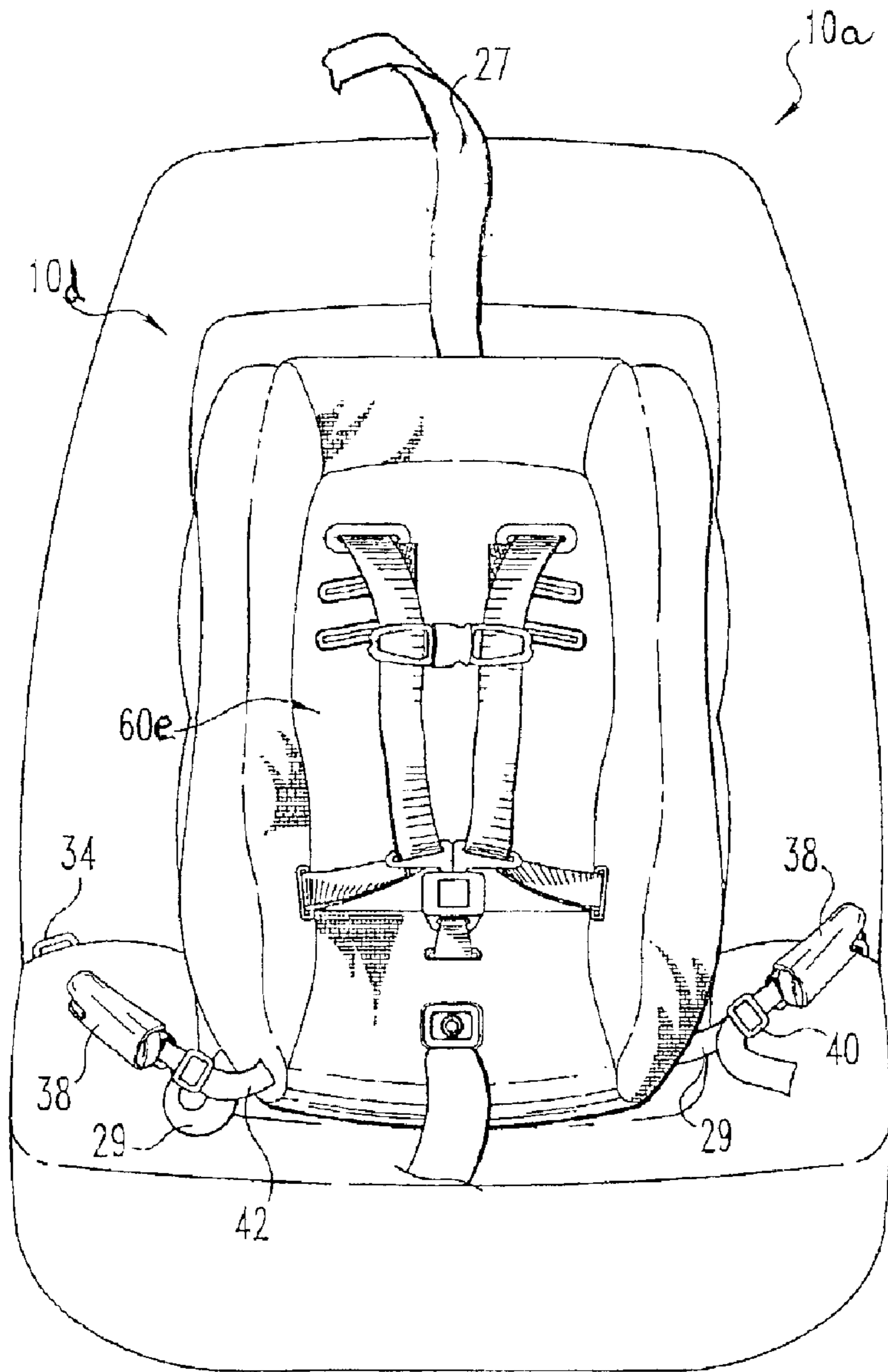


Fig. 40

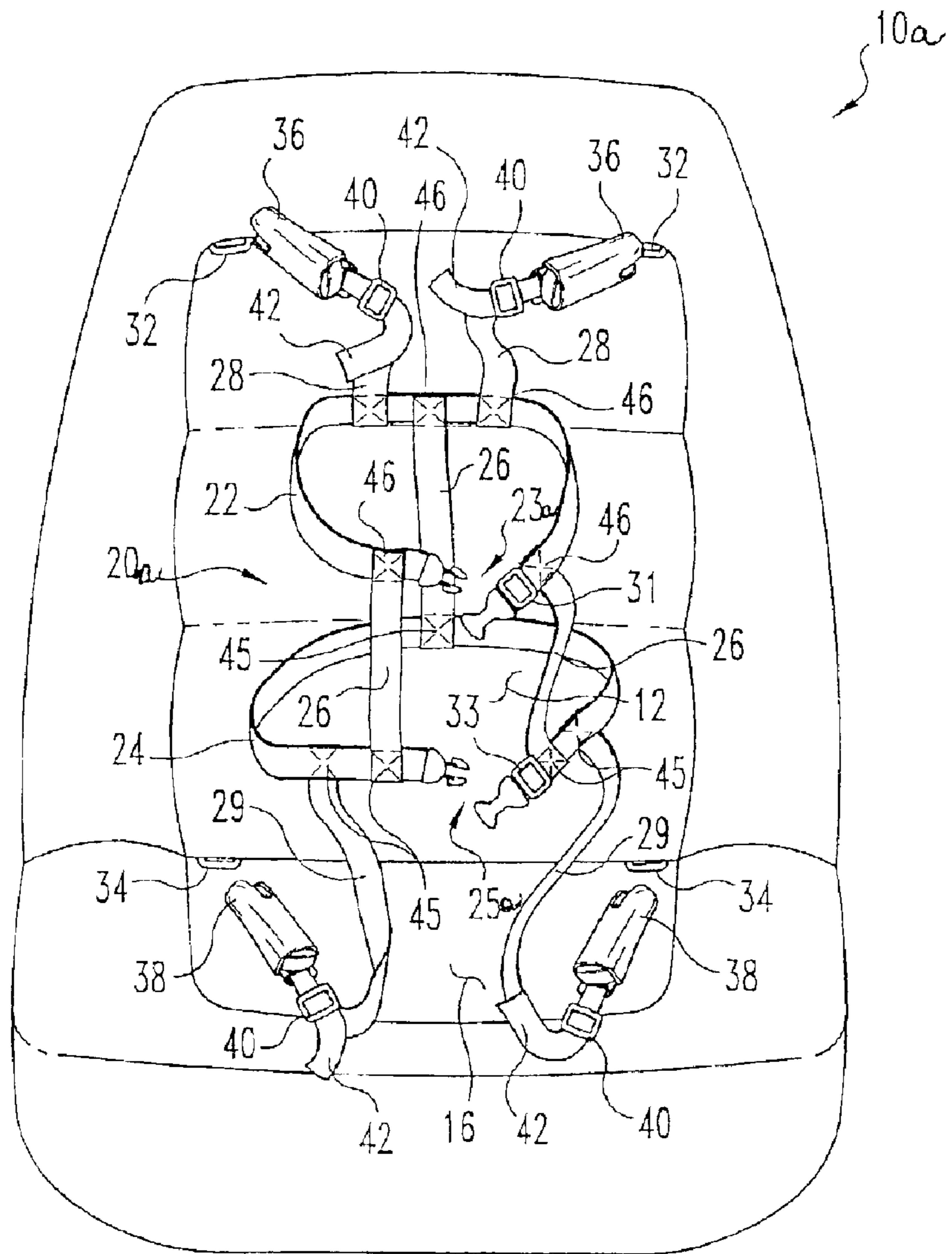


Fig. 41

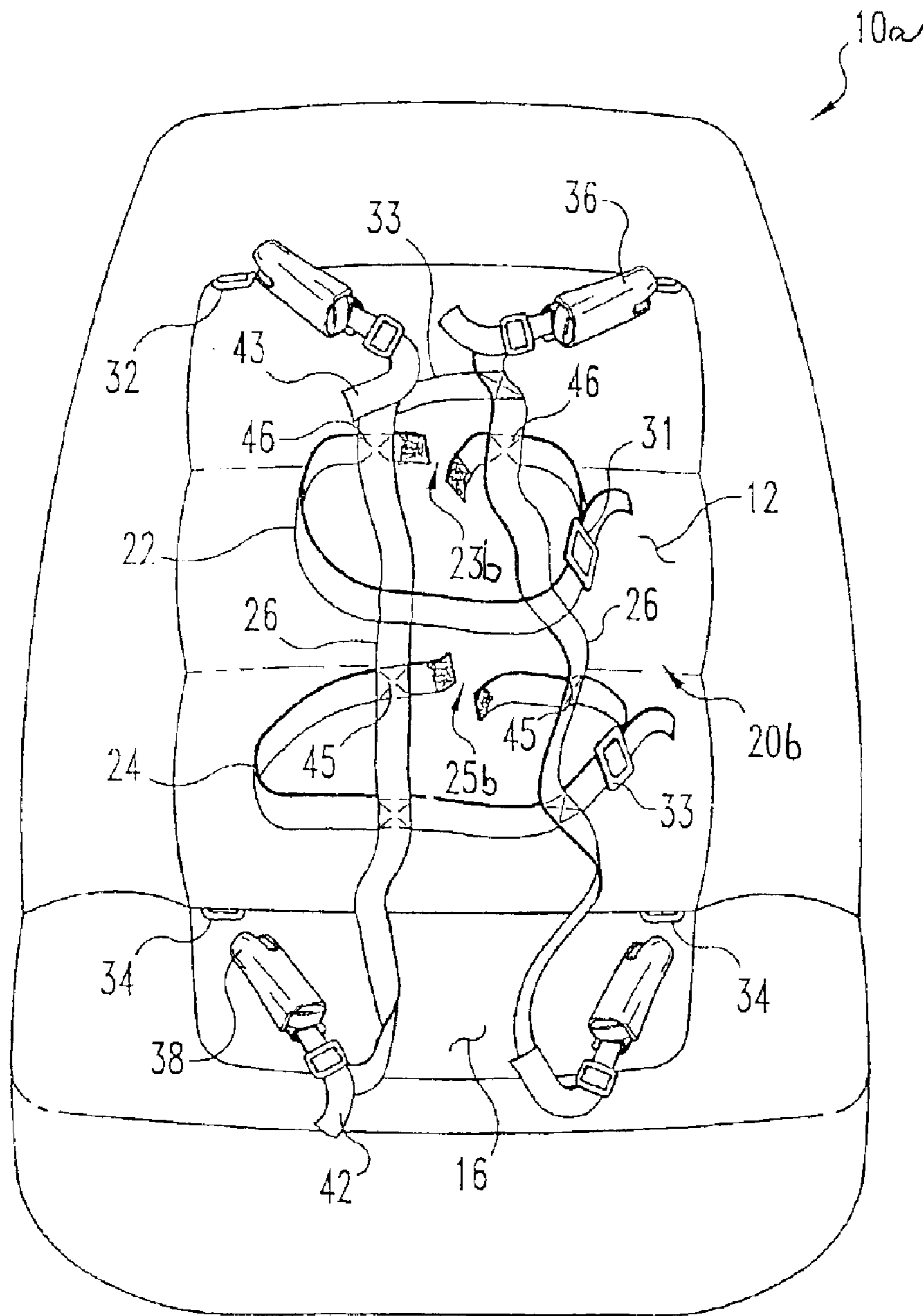


Fig.42

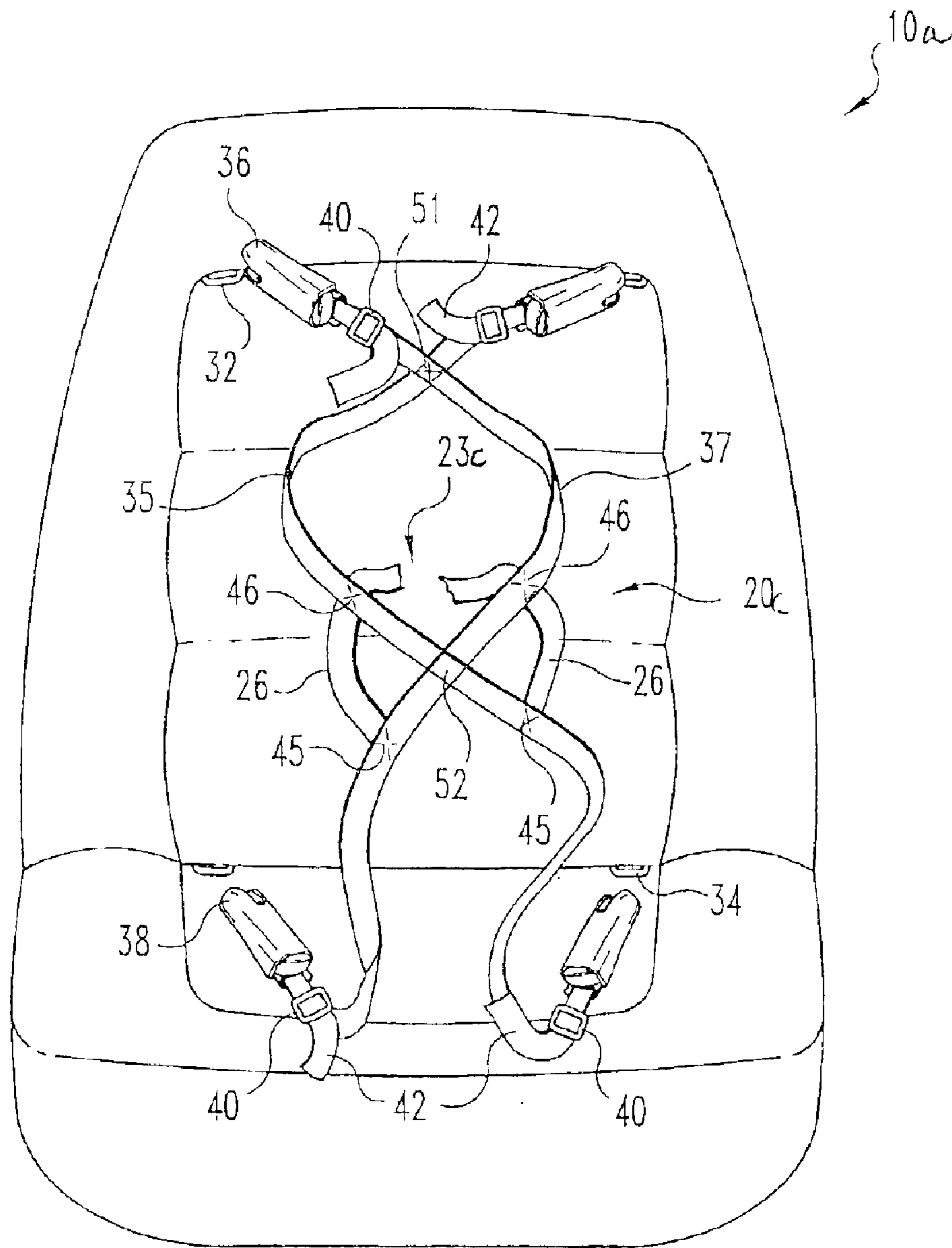


Fig.43

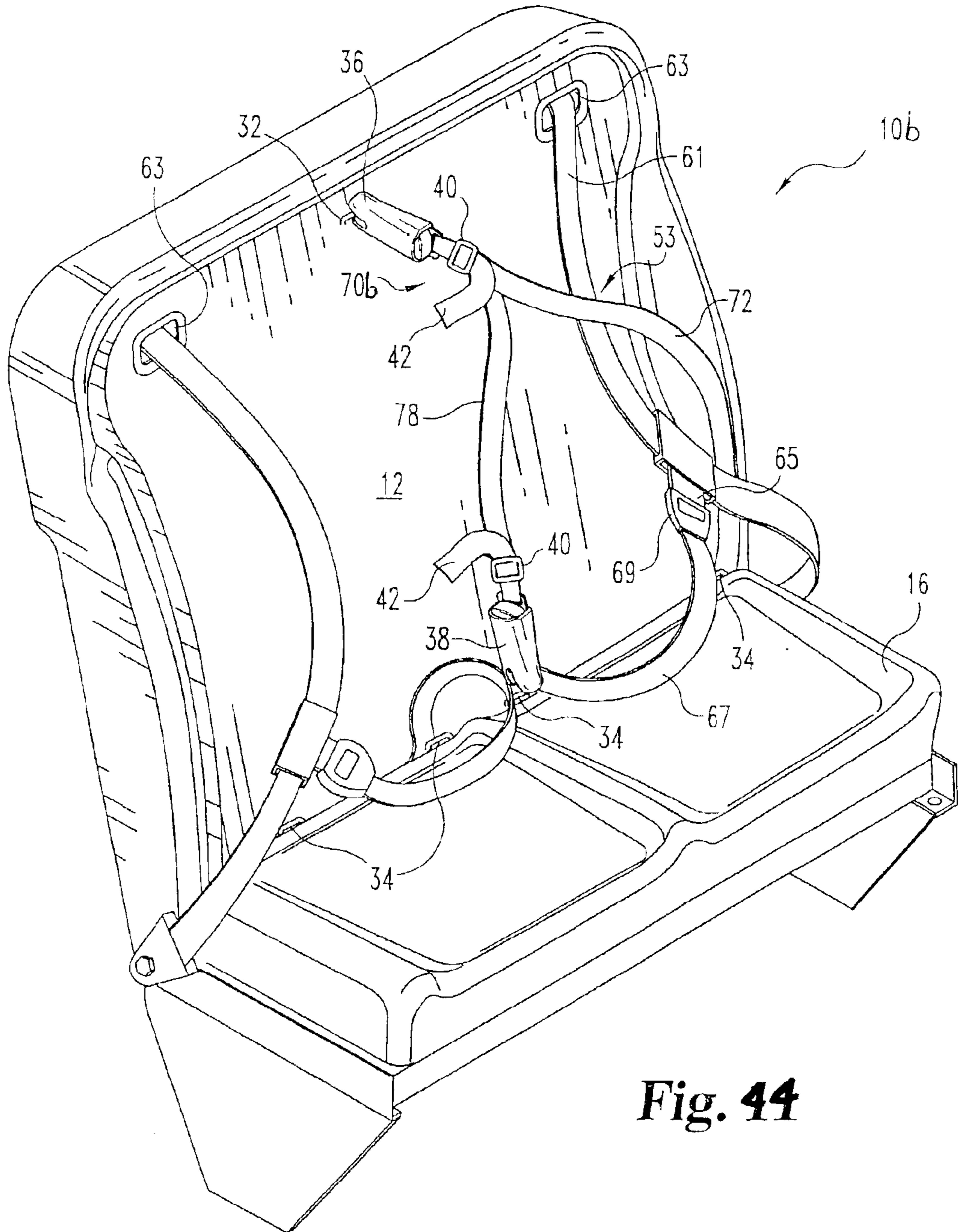


Fig. 44

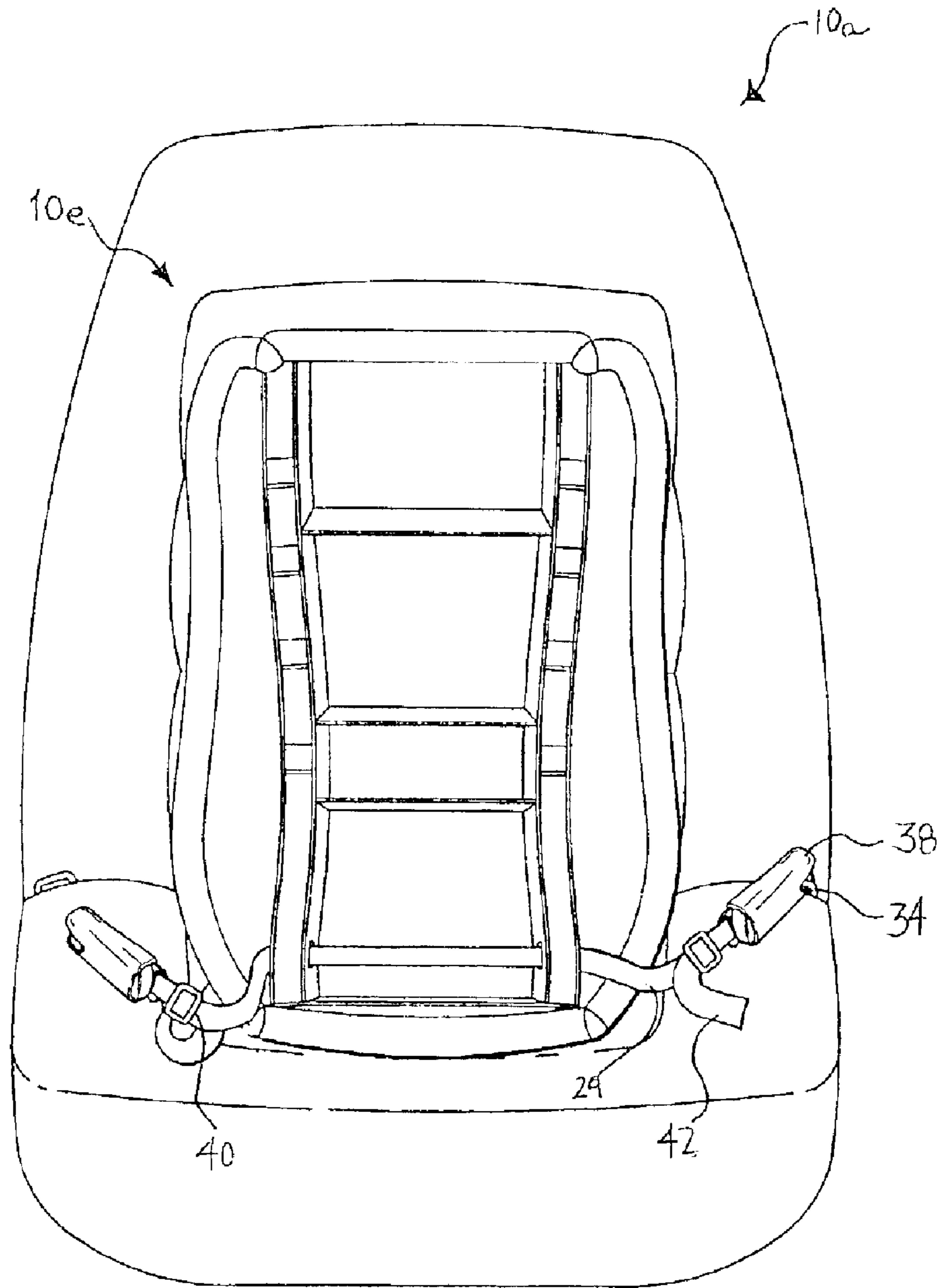


Fig. 45

RESTRAINT SYSTEM FOR A VEHICLE**CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATIONS**

This application is a continuation-in-part of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/734,361, filed Dec. 11, 2000, and titled Restraint System for a School Bus Seat, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,485,098, which is a continuation of U.S. patent application Ser. No. 09/479,197, filed Jan. 7, 2000, now abandoned, which in turn is a continuation-in-part of U.S. Ser. No. 09/183,088 filed Oct. 30, 1998, and titled Restraint System for a School Bus Seat, now U.S. Pat. No. 6,123,388, all of which are hereby incorporated herein by reference. This application claims the benefit of and priority to U.S. Provisional Patent Application Ser. No. 60/362,203, filed Mar. 5, 2002, and titled Child Restraint System, the disclosure of which is also hereby incorporated herein by reference.

FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention is in the field of passenger restraint systems used to provide a protective passenger environment

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRIOR ART

Conventional seat belt systems combining a lap belt and an upper torso belt are well known. These three-point restraint systems are usually used with seats offering rigid support for the belts. As typically used in a vehicle, the three-point restraint system consists of single belt having its opposite ends mounted to a pair of retractors with a seat belt tongue connected to the belt intermediate to the belt ends. The tongue may be swung across the person and engaged with a buckle affixed to the seat thereby positioning one portion of the belt across the lap and another portion of the belt across the upper torso. In some systems, only one end of the belt is mounted to a retractor while the other end is anchored to the seat or vehicle. Seat belts are active restraint devices, requiring a passenger to actively engage the restraints for them to be effective.

School bus passenger seats usually do not employ active restraint safety devices, but instead rely on a passive restraint seat design. School bus passenger seats are built to specifications conforming to the safety standards set by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, DOT. These are codified as 49 C.F.R. Ch.V, .sectn. 571.222, Standard No. 222, and require that the seat back bend or deflect forward when a force is applied to the rear of the seat back. The code further specifies that 4000 W inch-pounds of energy must be absorbed within a maximum forward deflection of the seat back of 14 inches and 2800 W inch-pounds be absorbed within a maximum rearward deflection of the seat back of 10 inches where W represents the number of seating positions for which the seat is designed. 49 C.F.R., Ch.V, .sectn. 571.222, S5.1.3–5.1.4. The code specifies a passive restraint system, and does not require any sort of active restraints, such as a two-point passenger restraining lap belt or a three-point passenger restraining lap belt and torso harness combination. Children riding the school bus are protected in head-on collisions by the seat back in front of them deflecting forward and absorbing some of their forward momentum.

Vehicles with deforming or deflecting seats provide special problems regarding the integration of active restraint seat belt systems. Passive restraint systems are designed to protect a passenger who has been thrown forward by having

the impacted seat back deflect upon impact of the thrown passenger and absorb some of their momentum. In a school bus seat combining active and passive restraint systems, both of the restraint systems have to be able to perform their functions and the seat must still conform to the regulations set forth in 49 C.F.R.

In U.S. Pat. No. 5,746,476, there is disclosed an automotive seat having a tower frame associated with the harness to transmit impact loads to the floor. Despite the prior devices, there is still a need for increased protection for children riding the school bus in an emergency or crash situation. The addition of an active restraint system, such as a three-point lap belt and torso harness combination, would provide enhanced passenger protection in a head-on crash as well as providing passenger protection in a broadside collision and/or roll situation. Disclosed herein is a three-point lap belt and torso harness passenger restraint system that is compatible with the pivoting and deflecting seats required by 49 C.F.R.

Conventional seat belt systems combining a lap belt and an upper torso belt are well known. These three-point restraint systems are usually used with seats offering rigid support for the belts. As typically used in a vehicle, the three-point restraint system consists of single belt having its opposite ends mounted to a pair of retractors with a seat belt tongue connected to the belt intermediate to the belt ends. The tongue may be swung across the person and engaged with a buckle affixed to the seat thereby positioning one portion of the belt across the lap and another portion of the belt across the upper torso.

Three-point seat belt systems installed in vehicles by the original manufacturer may be ineffective or unsafe when used by, for example, infants, children, or those with physical handicaps. Various types of add-on child restraint systems and harness positioning restraint systems have been fashioned for use by these users. For example, portable child seats for infants and children up to about 50 pounds and booster seats for children between 30 and 60 pounds, mount to a vehicle for restraint of a child. Examples of booster seats are disclosed in U.S. Pat. Nos. 5,797,654 to Stroud, 5,829,834 to Silverman, and 5,685,604 to Kain, which are incorporated by reference herein. The federal government has mandated that child restraint anchorage systems be installed in most vehicles, including cars, trucks, and certain school buses. These regulations, codified at 49 C.F.R. § 571.225 (Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards 225 or FMVSS 225), incorporated herein by reference, require two lower anchorages and an upper tether anchorage of specified configuration, location and strength parameters. Similarly, 49 C.F.R. § 571.213 (FMVSS 213), incorporated herein by reference, specifies the dimensions of tether hooks used to attach a tether strap to a tether anchorage. Disclosed herein are supplemental restraint systems configured to mount to vehicles in accordance with 49 C.F.R. §§ 571.225 and 571.213. These supplemental restraint systems may also be compatible with the aforementioned 49 C.F.R. Ch.V, § 571.222, Standard No. 222 (FMVSS 222), which is incorporated herein by reference, and which is applicable to school bus seats.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

In one embodiment of this invention a modular vehicle seat comprises a frame defining a seat support surface, the frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle. The modular vehicle seat further comprises first and second posts extending away from the seat support

surface of the frame and adjacent opposite ends of the frame. A seat member is mounted to the seat support surface. A panel defining first and second channels adjacent opposite edges of the panel defines a seat back with the first and second posts received within the first and second channels respectively.

In another embodiment, a modular vehicle seat comprises a frame defining a seat support surface, the frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle. The modular vehicle seat further comprises first and second posts extending away from the seat support surface of the frame and adjacent opposite ends of the frame. A seat member is mounted to the seat support surface. A panel is mounted to the first and second posts and defines a seat back. The panel has a front surface adjacent the seat member. The modular vehicle seat further comprises a seat back frame member movably attached to the frame adjacent opposite ends of the frame. The front surface of the panel is configured to receive the seat back frame member therein. The seat back frame member is movable away from the panel toward the seat member upon a vehicle impact with sufficient severity.

In another embodiment a modular vehicle seat comprises a frame defining a seat support surface, the frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle. The modular vehicle seat further comprises first and second posts extending away from the seat support surface of the frame and adjacent opposite ends of the frame. A seat member is mounted to the seat support surface. A panel is mounted to the first and second posts and defines a seat back. The panel has a front surface adjacent the seat member. The modular vehicle seat further comprises a seat back frame member movably attached to the frame adjacent opposite ends of the frame. A seat base is movably mounted to the seat back frame adjacent the seat member and is movable downwardly toward the seat member to form a child seat. The front surface of the panel is configured to receive the seat back frame member and the seat base therein. The seat back frame member and the seat base are movable away from the front surface of the panel toward the seat member upon a vehicle impact with sufficient severity.

Additional features will become apparent to those skilled in the art upon consideration of the following detailed description of illustrative embodiments and features exemplifying the best mode of carrying out the invention as presently perceived and various combinations thereof.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1a is a perspective view of a bench seat frame incorporating a first embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 1b is the same view as FIG. 1a with the addition of an attached seat belt assembly.

FIG. 2a is a partial side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 1.

FIG. 2b is a front elevation view of the tower member of the embodiment of FIG. 1.

FIG. 2c is a side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 1 coupled to a bench seat frame.

FIG. 2d is a side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 1 mounted below a bench seat frame.

FIG. 3a is an enlarged fragmentary front elevation view of the slot in the tower member of the embodiment of FIG. 1.

FIG. 3b is an enlarged side fragmentary elevation view of the slot in the tower member of FIG. 3a.

FIG. 3c is an enlarged side fragmentary elevation view of the intersection of the tower member and the connecting member, showing the rotation of the tower member.

FIG. 4a is a perspective view of a bench seat frame incorporating a second embodiment of the present invention.

FIG. 4b is the same view as FIG. 4a with the addition of an attached seat belt assembly.

FIG. 5a is a side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 4a.

FIG. 5b is a side elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 4b.

FIG. 5c is a partial front elevation view of the embodiment of FIG. 4b.

FIG. 6a is a side elevation view of the connecting member of the embodiment of FIG. 4a.

FIG. 6b is a front elevation view of one vertical piece of the tower member of FIG. 4a.

FIG. 6c is a side elevation view of one vertical piece of the tower member of FIG. 4a.

FIG. 7 is an enlarged perspective view of the crossbar member of the second embodiment of FIG. 4a.

FIG. 8 is a top plan view of the embodiment of FIG. 4b.

FIG. 9 is a perspective view of the illustrative embodiment of the bench seat frame with a belt slack take-up device.

FIG. 10 is a fragmentary enlarged perspective view of the left side of the bench seat frame of FIG. 9.

FIG. 11 is a fragmentary cross sectional view of the seat portion and back portion of the frame in a pre-crash condition taken generally along the line 11—11 of FIG. 9 and viewed in the direction of the arrows.

FIG. 12 is the same view as FIG. 11 only showing the back portion tilted forward in a crash condition with belt slack taken up.

FIG. 13 is a fragmentary top view of the bench seat of FIG. 10.

FIG. 14 is a cross sectional view taken generally along the line 14—14 of FIG. 10 and viewed in the direction of the arrows.

FIG. 15 is a perspective view of an illustrative embodiment of the seat including the seat cushion.

FIG. 16 is a side perspective view of the seats depicted in FIGS. 9 and 15.

FIG. 17 is a side schematic view of an illustrative embodiment of a system of seats.

FIG. 18 is an exploded view of an illustrative embodiment of a passive restraint seat.

FIG. 19 is a perspective view of a frame assembly of the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 18.

FIG. 20 is a bottom perspective view of an illustrative seat member.

FIG. 21 is a rear perspective view of another illustrative embodiment of a seat providing active and passive restraint of a passenger and showing a partial cutaway of the passive restraint back panel.

FIG. 22 is a front perspective view of the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 21.

FIG. 23 is a side schematic view of an illustrative pivot mechanism of the illustrative embodiment of FIGS. 21 and 22.

FIG. 24 is a perspective view of another illustrative embodiment including a partial exploded view of the pivot mechanism of FIG. 23 and of a restraint mounting portion.

FIG. 25 is another perspective view of the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 24 including a mounting back panel and passive restraint back panel, both of which are partially cutaway.

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FIG. 26 is a back perspective view of the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 24.

FIG. 27 is a perspective view of the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 24 including cushion members and active restraint web belts.

FIG. 28 is an exploded view of the cushion members of the embodiments of FIGS. 18, 21, 27 and 29

FIG. 29 is a perspective view of another illustrative embodiment of a seat restraint system.

FIG. 30 is a perspective view of an illustrative web path-altering device.

FIG. 31 is a perspective view of another illustrative web path-altering device.

FIG. 32 is a perspective view of another illustrative web path-altering device.

FIG. 33 is a perspective view of another illustrative web path-altering device.

FIG. 34 is a partial front view of an alternative connector for use with any of the embodiments depicted in FIGS. 29-31 and 36-44.

FIG. 35 is a partial front view of another alternative connector for use with any of the embodiments depicted in FIGS. 29,31, 33 and 36-44.

FIG. 36 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a supplemental restraint incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 37 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a supplemental restraint incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 38 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a supplemental restraint incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 39 is a front view of a child seat mounted to a vehicle seat incorporating one illustrative embodiment incorporating the present invention.

FIG. 40 is a front view of a child seat mounted to a vehicle seat incorporating one illustrative embodiment incorporating the present invention.

FIG. 41 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a restraint harness incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 42 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a restraint harness incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 43 is a front view of a seat having one illustrative embodiment of a restraint harness incorporating the present invention mounted thereto.

FIG. 44 is a perspective view of a vehicle seat incorporating one illustrative embodiment of a positioning harness system according to the present invention.

FIG. 45 is a front view of a vehicle seat having a child restraint seat mounted rearwardly thereon according to one embodiment of the present invention.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ILLUSTRATIVE EMBODIMENTS

For the purposes of promoting an understanding of the principles of the invention, reference will now be made to the embodiments illustrated in the drawings and specific language will be used to describe the same. It will nevertheless be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is thereby intended, such alterations and further modifications in the illustrated device, and such further

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applications of the principles of the invention as illustrated therein being contemplated as would normally occur to one skilled in the art to which the invention relates.

Referring now more particularly to the drawings, FIGS. 1 through 3 show a three-point restraint system 120 incorporating a first and illustrative embodiment of the present invention. The restraint system 120 is designed to restrain two passengers sitting side by side. The restraint system 120 includes a tower member 121 movably coupled to a connecting member 122, and is adapted to be mounted to a conventional school bus passenger seat frame 123. Tower member 121 is adapted to move independently relative to seat frame 123. Preferably, tower member 121 is adapted to pivot relative to seat frame 123. The members comprising restraint system 120 are formed from steel or any convenient structural material. Seat frame 123 includes a seat support portion 124 connected to a seat back portion 125 and also connected to a leg portion 126 adapted to be affixed to a surface, such as the floor of a school bus. Seat support portion 124 is typically formed from one or more bent metal tubes 127 and includes a front portion 128 and a rear portion 129. Seat support portion 124 may be wrapped or embedded in a cushion upon which a passenger may sit. Seat back 125 portion, also formed from bent metal tubes 127, may likewise be cushioned.

Connecting member 122 is formed having a rectangular cross-sectional shape 130, although in other embodiments connecting member 122 may have any convenient cross-sectional shape. Tower member 121 has a top end 131 and a bottom end 132. Bottom end 132 includes a slot 133 shaped to accept connecting member 122 and a pair of parallel apertures 134 perpendicular to slot 133 through which rear portion 129 of seat support portion 124 may pass to couple tower member 121 to seat frame 123. Tower member 121 lies in the plane defined by seat back portion 125 with the top end of tower member 121 extending substantially into seat back portion 125.

Connecting member 122 has a front end 137 and a rear end 138, and includes a rear aperture 140 through which rear portion 129 may extend to mount connecting member 122 to seat 123. Connecting member 122 is inserted into slot 133 in tower member 121. In operation, tower member apertures 134 may be aligned coincident with connecting member rear aperture 140 enabling rear metal tube 129 to be passed therethrough, coupling tower member 121 and connecting member 122 to seat support portion 123 and to each other. Connecting member 122 further includes front aperture 141 through which front portion 128 extends, mounting connecting member 122 to seat 123. (See FIG. 2c) Alternatively, connecting member 122 may be affixed to seat support portion 124 by any convenient fastening means (See FIG. 2d)

In operation, connecting member 122 lies in the plane defined by seat support portion 124. Both tower member 121 and connecting member 122 may be embedded in cushions that simultaneously provide passenger comfort and prevent restraint system 120 from moving or jiggling. In the illustrative embodiment, tower member 121 is pivotally coupled to seat support portion 124. A stop means operable to limit the movement of tower member 121 is provided by the presence of connecting member 122 in slot 133, which limits the pivot angle 139 (see FIG. 3c) through which tower member 121 may be rotated. While the illustrative stop means is connecting member 122 filling slot 133, any convenient stop means may be used. It is preferable that the pivot angle 139 through which tower member 121 may pivot is acute. It is more preferable that the pivot angle 139 be

about 17 degrees, corresponding to the maximum allowed deflection of seat back portion 125 caused by two unbelted passengers striking seat back 125 from behind and two belted passengers pulling on tower member 121 from the front. Slot 133 preferably extends through tower member 121 at a slight angle to the normal, such that when connecting member 122 engages tower member 121 connecting member 122 may rest in the horizontal plane of seat support portion 124 while tower member 121 remains tilted backwards a few degrees to the vertical. (See FIG. 3c) In this embodiment, the dimensions of connecting member 122 and slot 133 are sized relative to each other such that tower member 121 may rotate forward through a maximum of 17 degrees. (See FIG. 3c).

Restraint system 120 also includes anchor wing 143 connected to connecting member 122. A seat belt anchor 144 is fixedly attached to anchor wing 143, becoming one point of a three-point restraint. (See FIG. 1b) Seat belt anchor 144 connects lap belt 145 terminating in a tongue 146 to seat frame 123. Alternatively, two seat belt retractors could be attached to both anchor wings 143, retractably connecting lap belts 145 thereto. Restraint system 120 further includes a buckle 147 fixedly attached to seat support portion 124 and adapted to lockingly engage tongue 146. Restraint system 120 further includes a pair of guides 148, such as, a conventional D-loop, attached near the top of tower member 121. A pair of torso belt retractors 149 are connected to tower member 121, each housing a torso belt 150 and becoming the second point of the three-point restraint. The torso belt 150 is extended upwardly through guide 148 and downwardly across the torso of a seated passenger. The extending end of torso belt 150 also connects to tongue 146. When tongue 146 is locked in buckle 147, buckle 147 becomes the third point of the three-point restraint. Alternatively, a single belt (not shown) may extend between retractor 149 and anchor 144 with a tongue (not shown) slideably mounted intermediate thereto. In operation, the invention adds active passenger restraint protection to the passive restraint already provided by the deflecting school bus seats. Tower member 121 does not interfere with the passive restraint function of the seat back 125, since tower member 121 is adapted to pivot forward along with the seat back 125 in response to a rear impact. Seat back portion 125 deflects forward in response to a forward force applied thereto consisting of a passenger located rearward of the seat back portion 125 impacting seat back portion 125 and/or a forward force applied to support tower 121 via torso belt 150 by a seated passenger pulling against the torso belt 150.

Another embodiment of the present invention is shown in FIGS. 4 through 8. In this embodiment, the restraint system 220 includes a tower member 221, a connecting member 222, and a crossbar member 252 and is adapted to be mounted to a seat frame 223. Seat frame 223 includes a seat support portion 224 connected to a seat back portion 225. Seat frame 223 is also connected to a seat leg portion 226 adapted to be affixed to a surface, such as a school bus floor. Seat support portion 224 is made of bent metal tubing and includes a front portion 228. Rod member 229 extends transversely across seat back portion 225 substantially within the plane defined by seat support portion 224. Seat frame 223 may be wrapped or embedded in cushioning material to provide passenger comfort.

Harness support assembly is made up of tower member 221, connecting member 222, and crossbar member 252, and is mountable to seat frame 223. When so mounted, tower member 221 lies substantially in the plane defined by seat back portion 225, and extends through the plane defined

by the seat support portion 224. Rear end 238 of connecting member 222 connects to tower member 221 below the plane defined by seat support portion 224. Front end 237 of connecting member 222 connects to front portion 228 of seat support portion 224. In this embodiment, front end 237 of connecting member 222 features front aperture 241 (FIG. 6a) through which front portion 228 of seat support portion 224 extends. Tower member 221 is pivotally mounted to seat support portion 224 at pivot point 253. In order to accommodate two passengers, a pair of harness assemblies is provided, each with a tower member 221, connecting member 222 and crossbar members 252 and 254.

Rod member 229 extends through tower member 221 and crossbar members 252 and 254. In the illustrative embodiment, crossbar member 252 includes two parallel plates lying substantially within the plane of the seat support portion 224 and extending from the front portion 228 to the rod member 229. Proximal end 255 (FIG. 7) of crossbar member 252 includes substantially circular apertures 265 through which front portion 228 of seat frame 223 extends. Distal end 256 of crossbar member 252 includes circular apertures 266 through which rod member 229 extends at pivot point 253. In this embodiment a crossbar coupling member 257 (FIG. 8) connects the plates of member 252. Likewise, a second connecting member 254 is provided consisting of two plates being connected to the second tower member in the same manner as described for member 252.

Tower member 221 comprises a pair of substantially vertically disposed members 258 (FIG. 5c), connected by tower coupling member 260. In other embodiments, tower member 221 may comprise a different number of vertical members. Likewise, in this embodiment connecting member 222 comprises two interconnected portions 259 (see FIG. 5c).

Each connecting member 222 includes a slot 270 (see FIG. 4a) at rear end 238. A pin 272 extends through slots 270 with the opposite pin ends fixed to vertical members 258. The pin slideably connects members 222 to the tower 221. In normal operation, tower member 221 rests within the plane of the seat back 225, tilted slightly rearwards with the pin 272 positioned at the forward end 273 (see FIG. 6a) of the slot 270. As tower member pivots about pivot point 253, pin 272 moves towards the rear of slot 270. Pivoting of tower member 221 is halted when pin 272 reaches rear end 274 of slot 270. The length of slot 270 determines the maximum angle through which tower member 221 may pivot. In this embodiment, the length of the slot 270 is such that the maximum angle through which the tower member 221 may pivot is 17 degrees.

As in the previous embodiment, restraint system 220 also includes guides 248 connected near the top end 231 of tower member 221. Seat belt retractors 249 (FIG. 5b) are fixedly attached to the two vertical members of tower 221. Each seat belt retractor 249 house a torso belt 250, which connect to a tongue 246 in turn connected to lap belt 245. Restraint system 220 also includes a buckle 247 fixedly attached to seat support portion 224 and adapted to lockingly engage tongue 246. Torso belt 250 is extended upwardly from torso belt retractor 249 through guide 248 and downwardly across the torso of a seated passenger while lap belt 245 extends horizontally across the passenger's lap. Alternately, a single belt (not shown) may extend between retractor 249 to anchor 244 with a belt tongue slideably mounted intermediate thereto.

Many variations are contemplated and included in the present invention. In addition to those described in relation

to the above embodiments, the present system contemplates including means for preventing premature forward deployment of the tower member **221** relative to the seat back. For example, the top end of tower **221** may be connected to seat back portion **225** limiting relative motion therebetween until sufficient force breaks the top end of the tower apart from the seat back portion.

The preferred embodiment of the restraint system is shown in FIGS. 9–15. School bus seat **300** includes a main frame **304** with a pair of front legs **301** and **302** and a pair of rear legs **303**. The legs extend upwardly being joined to main frame **304** having a front member **305** integrally joined to a pair of rearwardly extending horizontal members **306**, **307**, and **309**. A tubular member **308** has opposite ends integrally joined to side members **306** and **307** with center member **309** extending between and integrally joined to front member **305** and cylindrical member **308**. A pair of flanges **310** and **311** are integrally joined to the cylindrical member **308** and the opposite sides of member **309**.

Frame **304** forms the frame for the seat portion of the seat whereas a second frame **312** forms the frame for the back portion of the seat. Frame **312** includes a horizontally extending tubular portion **313** integrally joined to a pair of downwardly extending tubular portions **314** and **315** forming a single frame, in turn, having bottom ends integrally joined to frame **304**. Frames **304** and **312** are located within the cushion respectively of the seat portion and back portion of the seat. Tubular portions **314** and **315** are rigid; however, will bend forward as forward impact pressure is applied to the back portion of the seat forcing the back portion of the seat about its bottom end toward the seat portion of the seat.

Upwardly extending towers **316** and **317** are located immediately inward of frame portions **314** and **315**. Tower **316** is mounted to and between plates **355** and **356** (FIG. 10) which have holes **380** (FIG. 9) through which tube **308** freely extends allowing the tower to pivot on tube **308** in the direction of arrow **322** to and from the seat portion of frame **304**. Tower **317** is mounted in a similar manner. The top ends of towers **316** and **317** are joined together by horizontally extending member **323**. Flanges **324** and **325** are integrally attached to the top ends of towers **316** and **317** and provide guides through which the webs extend. Wall **339** is fixedly mounted to frame **312** and member **323** preventing member **323** from moving behind frame **312**. Wall **339** breaks when forward force is applied to either frame **312** or towers **316/317** allowing independent movement of towers **316/317** relative to frame **312**.

Box constructions **381** and **382** extend between and are fixedly attached to rear member **308** and front member **305**. Each box construction supports a plurality of stationary bearings and a web retractor. Box construction **381** and **382** include respectively inner plates **328** and **329** having rear ends integrally secured to member **308** and front ends fixedly secured to member **305**. Likewise, box constructions **381** and **382** have outwardly located members, respectively **330** and **331** integrally secured and extending between members **308** and **305**. Retractor plates **326** and **327** are secured respectively to members **328** and **330** and members **329** and **331**. Two conventional inertia locking retractors are respectively mounted to and beneath plates **326** and **327** with the web of each retractor extending rearwardly toward tubular member **308**.

Each box construction **381** and **382** have three stationary bearings with their opposite ends fixedly attached to the inner member and outer member of each box construction. For example, bearings **332**, **333** and **334** (FIG. 10) have first

ends fixedly attached to inner member **328** and second ends fixedly attached to outer member **330**. Retractor **335** (FIG. 11) is fixedly attached to and beneath plate **326** and has web **336** extending rearwardly over stationary bearings **332–334** but beneath movable bearings **337** and **338**. Web **336** continues around tubular member **308** extending upwardly behind tower **316** to the top of the tower. The web then extends over a bearing surface at the top of the tower and freely through a loop, such as flange **324** (FIG. 9) with the distal end **340** of web **336** being fixedly attached to the rear corner **341** of frame **304**.

A conventional seat belt buckle tongue **342** is slidably mounted to web **336** and is lockingly engagable with a conventional seat belt buckle **343**, in turn, attached by web **344** to flange **310**. Thus, with web **344** extending upward through the seat cushion, tongue **342** may lockingly engage buckle **343** forcing the web across the shoulder and chest of the occupant residing on the seat and then across the lap of the occupant. Web **336** therefore includes a chest portion **395** and a lap portion **345** when the tongue is secured to the buckle. Web **336** extends outward of the cushion forming the back portion of the seat. An identical retractor web combination is provided on the right side of the seat as viewed in FIG. 9 relative to tower **317** and box construction **382**.

When force is applied in a forward direction to the rear of the seat by a passenger located behind seat **300**, frame portions **314** and **315** are pushed forward bending and pivoting about their bottom ends. Frame portions **314** and **315** are sufficiently rigid to hold the seat back portion in an upright position but sufficiently weak to bend when rearward force is applied thereto thereby being in compliance with the safety standards set by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as discussed in the Description of the Prior Art herein. If a seat **300** is occupied then the forward motion of the passenger on seat **300** will apply forward force via web **336** to tower **316** rupturing breakable wall **339** allowing the tower to pivot independent of frame **312**. Towers **316** and **317** are pivotally mounted to tube **308** thereby allowing the towers to pivot forward towards the seat portion or frame **304** of the seat. A pair of stop flanges **350** and **351** are fixedly attached respectively to towers **316** and **317** and project forwardly of the towers. The stop flanges are designed to allow only a limited amount of forward pivotal motion of the towers. Once the stop flanges contact members **330** and **331**, additional forward pivotal motion of the towers and frame **312** is prevented.

Stop flange **350** will now be described it being understood that a similar description applies to stop flange **351**. Stop flange **350** includes a pair of spaced apart walls **355** and **356** (FIG. 10) fixedly secured to the opposite sides of the bottom of tower **316**. A wall **357** has opposite ends fixedly attached to walls **355** and **356** and extends therebetween. Wall **357** is elevated and spaced apart from the top surface of member **330** when the tower is in the erect or normal position. Wall **357** is spaced apart from the top surface of member **330** to only allow a predetermined amount of forward pivotal motion of the tower until the wall contacts the top surface of member **330** thereby preventing further pivotal motion of the tower and frame **312**. The amount of forward pivotal motion of the tower is designed to be in accordance with the deflection requirements of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration specifications as previously discussed.

A web slack take-up device is mounted within each box construction **381** and **382**. The web slack take-up device **360** (FIG. 13) positioned within box construction **381** will now be described it being understood that a similar description

applies to the web slack take-up device positioned within box construction **382**. Device **360** includes a bottom wall **361** secured to a pair of upwardly extending side walls **362** and **363** between which are fixedly mounted a pair of bearings **337** and **338**. Web **336** extends between bearings **337** and **338** and the three stationary bearings **332**–**334** (FIG. **11**). The proximal ends of walls **362** and **363** are fixedly attached to sleeve **318** and are designed to pivot around tube **308**. Tube **308** extends freely through sleeve **318** (FIG. **9**) and sleeve **319** of the slack take up device mounted within box construction **382**. Walls **362** and **363** have cut out portions **386** and **387** (FIG. **11**) preventing interference of walls **362** and **363** with stationary bearings **333** and **332** when the tower is in the erect position.

Towers **316** and **317** cause the slack take-up device to pivot downwardly as the towers pivot toward the seat portion of the seat; however, pivotal movement of the towers in an opposite direction away from the seat portion does not cause the slack take-up devices to pivot to their original positions. Each tower includes a projection contactable with a projection extending outwardly from sleeves **318** and **319**. For example, tower **316** includes projection **370** (FIG. **14**) extending inwardly whereas sleeve **318** includes projection **371** extending outwardly toward tower **316**. Thus, when tower **316** pivots in a counter clockwise direction, as viewed in FIG. **14**, projection **370** contacts projection **371** causing sleeve **318** and bearings **337** and **338** to pivot therewith in a counter clockwise direction removing slack from the web. Movement of tower **316** in a clockwise direction simply moves projection **370** apart from projection **371** without moving sleeve **318**.

In operation, upon the occurrence of a crash, forward force may or may not be applied to the rear of the seat by the passenger located behind the seat. Forward force is applied however to web **336** by the occupant resting upon seat **300**. With retractor **335** locked as the result of sensed deceleration, forward force is applied via the web to towers **316** and **317** causing the towers to pivot forwardly toward the seat portion of the seat. Stops **350** and **351** of towers **316** and **317** limit the forward pivotal motion of the towers. Simultaneously, the web slack take-up devices within each box construction **381** and **382** pivot downward resulting in bearings **337** and **338** of each web slack take-up device contacting the respective web of each retractor forcing the webs into a serpentine path as depicted in FIG. **12** thereby removing any slack from the webs. Even if an occupant is not resting upon seat **300**, impact of a passenger behind seat **300** upon the back portion of seat **300** will cause frame **312** to bend and pivot toward the seat portion of the seat to the maximum angle permitted by stops **350** and **351**.

FIG. **15** illustrates seat **300** which has a seat cushion or other enclosure **386** enclosing frame **304**, a passenger restraint cushion or other enclosure **383** enclosing frame **312** and a center cushion or other enclosure **384** enclosing towers **316** and **317** along with member **323**. Slots **385** are provided in cushion **384** for the webs to extend through. Cushion **383** is indented to receive cushion **384** to allow the center cushion **384** to pivot forward independent of outer cushion **383** when force is applied to towers **316** and **317** by occupant force being applied to the webs.

Many advantages flow from use of the preferred embodiment of the invention. For example, webbing from a restrained occupant on seat **300** simultaneously applies load to towers **316** and **317** causing the towers to pivot forward while applying tension load to the entire webbing length. That is, slack is removed from the webbing surrounding the occupant by the downwardly pivoting slack take up devices.

Tension of the restraint is therefore increased around the occupant. A large mechanical advantage is provided by the lengths of the towers which exceed the length of the slack take up devices. As the towers pivot downwardly along with bearings **337** and **338**, the tension increases proportionately thereby decreasing the occupant forward acceleration rate proportionally. The increasing tension in the lap portion of the web centers the occupant in proper seating position during forward impact movement. Likewise, additional tension in the web controls kinematic motion of the restrained occupant so that the motion is straight during forward motion and straight during rebound motion. The added tension in the web will further cause the occupant to be in proper seating position after the occupant motion is complete.

The system of FIG. **9** will not cause additional stiffness to the seat back when the occupant is unrestrained or the seat is unoccupied and thus, maintains the energy management capability for any unrestrained occupant located behind seat **300**. The system preserves the under seat clearance for other vehicle features. Likewise, the system will not require additional structure to the seat back when the restrained or unrestrained occupant is forced rearward into the seat back during impact.

FIG. **16** illustrates seat **300**, as depicted in FIGS. **9** and **15**, with the center cushion **384** pivoted forward of the outer cushion **383**. As previously described, the center cushion **384** encloses upwardly extending towers **316** and **317**, each tower having a top portion and a bottom portion, and horizontally extending member **323** therebetween, which together form a pivotable third frame or seat back frame **390** for supporting the center cushion **384** and for supporting and guiding the web belt **336** as depicted in FIGS. **9**, **15** and **16**. The frame **390** together with center cushion **384** form a seat back for supporting a passenger in seat **300**, which seat back moves together substantially as a unit as shown in FIG. **16**. As described above and depicted in FIGS. **9**, **15** and **16**, seat cushion **386** encloses frame **304** to form the seat portion or seat bottom for supporting a passenger.

Referring to FIG. **17**, a system **398** of seats **300**, as previously described and depicted in FIGS. **9**, **15** and **16**, is illustrated with the seats in a longitudinally oriented row. The cushion **383** together with enclosed frame **312**, as described and depicted in FIGS. **9** and **15**–**17**, form a passenger restrainer for an unbelted passenger **396** or a belted passenger **397** sitting in any seat **300** situated behind any other seat **300** as depicted in FIG. **17**. As illustrated in FIGS. **15** and **16**, the cushion **383** has a rearwardly facing surface **388**. As illustrated in FIGS. **16** and **17**, the cushion **383** also has a forwardly facing surface **389** of the cushion **383** facing forward.

Referring to FIG. **17**, the operation of system **398** will be expanded upon. As already noted, when a passenger **396**, **397** sitting behind a seat **300** applies a force forwardly toward rearwardly facing surface **388** of seat **300**, as in the event of a crash, then the frame portions **314** and **315** of frame **312** deform, thereby absorbing the energy of the forwardly moving passenger **396**, **397**. As previously explained, if a forwardly moving passenger **397** is wearing a seat belt **336**, then the force of a crash will move the passenger **397** against web belt **336** with force sufficient to rupture breakable wall **339**, or other frangible retaining means known to one skilled in the art, allowing frame **390** and associated enclosing cushion **384** to pivot forward independent of frame **312** until a stop mechanism, such as previously described stop flanges **350** and **351** in cooperation with contact members **330** and **331**, stops the forward

movement of frame 390 and cushion 384. As previously noted, although the belt 336 and associated take-up device 360 absorb some of the passenger's 397 forward momentum, it will be appreciated that, depending on the size of belted passenger 397 and the force that passenger 397 applies on the web 336, the passenger 397 may or may not impact surface 388 in a crash. It will also be appreciated that the frangible retaining means 339 may be designed to rupture at varying amounts of force. Also, because the forward movement of frame 390 and cushion 384 is independent of frame 312, frame 312 and associated cushion 383 remain in place to absorb the energy of a passenger 396 or 397, whether belted or not, sitting in the seat behind the seat of a belted passenger 397. The phantom rendition of cushion 383 in FIG. 17 depicts the cushion 383 prior to contact by the forwardly moving passenger 396.

If a passenger 396 is not wearing a belt 336, then a crash will not move the passenger 396 against the web 336 and the retaining means 339 will therefore not break. In such a case, cushion 384 will remain within cushion 383 thereby pivoting forward with frame portions 314 and 315 and cushion 383 in the event that a passenger sitting behind impacts the rearwardly facing surface 388. Similarly, if a passenger sitting behind an empty seat applies forward pressure against the rearwardly facing surface 388 of such an empty seat, then frame 390 and cushion 384 will remain within frame 312 and cushion 383 and will not impede the movement of, but rather, will move forward with, frame portions 314 and 315.

Referring to FIGS. 18–20 another illustrative seat restraint is depicted. Vehicle seat restraint system 400 is an illustrative modular seat comprising a frame assembly 410, a floor mount assembly 430, a passenger restraint member or panel 440, and a seat member 470. Illustratively, frame 410 comprises a pair of spaced apart and generally vertically extending members or upright posts 411 and 412, sideform members 413 and 414, longitudinally extending front member or rail 415, longitudinally extending rear member 416, a pair of transversely extending side cross-member rails or struts 417 and 418, and a transversely extending central cross-member tube or strut 419. Sideforms 413, 414 are of a generally elbow-shaped and concave construction having an open sided L-shaped lodgment area 490 including a vertical portion extending upwardly from the bend in the elbow and having an open top end distal from the bend, and a horizontal portion extending transversely away from the bend and having an open reduced-neck end 426 distal therefrom. Each sideform includes a plurality of mounting apertures 423 and mounting slots 439. Posts 411 and 412, front member 415, and side cross-members 417, 418 each have a generally elongated and concave or C-shaped construction having open opposing ends and including a base wall with opposing lips protruding away therefrom and generally perpendicular thereto. Front member 415 thus has an open-sided and open-ended channel 491 extending the length of the member, and cross members 417, 418 each have an open-sided and open-ended channel 492 extending their respective lengths. Illustratively, the longitudinally extending rear member 416 and the center cross-strut 419 are of tubular construction characterized by a generally rectangular cross-section having a hollow core.

The L-shaped lodgment area is configured to receive into the open-ended vertical portion of the lodgment area 490 the posts 411, 412, and into the horizontal portion of the lodgment area 490 the rear member 416 and the side cross-struts 417, 418. Illustratively, the posts 411, 412 fit snugly into the vertical portion of the L-shaped lodgment

area 490 of their respective sideforms 413, 414. In addition, the posts 411, 412 and their respective sideform 413, 414 are affixed or coupled together, as by, for example, welding at the point of intersection 420. It will be appreciated that the posts 411, 412 and sideforms 413, 414 alternatively could be of monolithic construction. It further will be appreciated that posts 411, 412 may but need not be parallel one to the other. It will be apparent to one skilled in the art that the posts 411, 412 need not be affixed to the opposite ends of the frame 410 as just described, but rather that they may be affixed to the frame 410 adjacent to its opposite ends.

The opposing ends of rear member 416 fit one each into the elbow portion of each sideform 413, 414 such that each opposing end is generally aligned below and distal from said open top end and is generally distal from said open transverse end as best seen in FIG. 19. Each side cross-strut 417, 418 fits into the horizontal portion of the L-shaped lodgment area 490 of its respective sideform 413, 414 with their respective open sides 490, 492 adjacent to and facing toward each other thereby forming a unified member characterized by a generally rectangular cross section having a hollow core. Each cross-member 417, 418 is affixed or coupled to its respective sideform 413, 414 and to the rear member 416, which, in turn, is also coupled to the sideforms 413, 414. Central cross-member 419 is coupled to rear member 416 such that it is spaced apart from and disposed between side cross-members 417, 418. Front member 415 is configured to receive within its channel 491, and couple therewith, the neck-down ends of each of the sideforms 413, 414, and each of the cross-member 417, 418, 419 ends distal from the rear member 416. The reduced neck or notch portion 426 of each sideform 413, 414 is sized to provide a snug and generally flush fit with the front rail member 415 in both the horizontal and vertical planes. When so interconnected or assembled, the elongate members 413, 414, 415, 416, 419 define a seat support surface. Illustratively, the frame 410 couplings just described are accomplished by welding, however, other methods of coupling such as the use of bolts, rivets, or other fasteners may be used.

The frame assembly 410 may be attached to a frame support structure of a vehicle by one or more vehicle frame mounting members such as for example floor mount assembly 430 for mounting to the floor of the vehicle, or wall mount assembly or bracket 437 (FIGS. 26–28) for mounting to a sidewall of the vehicle, or a combination thereof. As best seen in FIG. 18, floor mount assembly 430 comprises a pedestal 431, and a pair of pedestal reinforcement brackets 432. Each pedestal 431 includes a plurality of frame-mount apertures 433 and a plurality of floor-mount apertures 434. Illustratively, there are four each of the frame-mount 433 and the floor-mount apertures 434, although a greater or fewer number could be used. Each of the pair of reinforcement brackets 432 likewise have a plurality of frame-mount 435 and floor mount 436 apertures corresponding to the respective pedestal apertures 433, 434. The reinforcement brackets 432 are sized to fit inside the pedestals 431 such that apertures 433 align with apertures 435 and apertures 434 align with apertures 436. The brackets and pedestals are coupled to the floor by a fastener, such as a bolt, rivet, screw, or nail, inserted through the aligned apertures 434, 436 into the vehicle floor. The seat frame 410 and floor mount assembly 430 are similarly attached together using fasteners, which are inserted through the aligned apertures 433, 435 and through frame-mount apertures 424 formed in each sideform 413, 414. In the illustrative embodiment of FIG. 18, there are only three frame-mount apertures 424. It will be appreciated, though, that there may be more or less than

three. Illustratively, these apertures **424** are extruded for use with a bolt but without the need for a nut. Also, the pedestals **430** are non-handed in that they are interchangeable, and, may include three or more floor mount assemblies **430** to mount the frame **410**. In the alternative, the wall mount assembly or bracket **437**, may be used with another wall mount or with one or more floor mount assemblies **430**. Similar to the floor mount assemblies **430**, the wall mount bracket **437** is non-handed and includes frame-mount apertures (not shown) adapted to couple the bracket **437** to whichever sideform **413**, **414** will be attached to the side wall of the vehicle. The wall mount bracket **437** includes apertures **438** for coupling the bracket **437** to the wall of the vehicle using fasteners, such as bolts, rivets, screws or nails. The floor mount assembly **430** is configurable for use with vehicles using conventional track flooring. Similarly, the wall mount bracket **437** is configurable for use with vehicles equipped with side wall mounted tracks. It will be appreciated that other frame mounting members, such as for example the legs **126**, **226**, **301**, **302** of FIGS. **1a-5c**, **9**, **15** and **16**, or the pedestal assembly shown in FIG. **17**, may be used to support and mount the frame assembly **410** in a vehicle. It will further be appreciated that any such frame mounting members and/or assemblies **126**, **226**, **301**, **302**, **430**, **437**, or combinations thereof may be mounted adjacent opposite ends of frame **410**. All such support means preserve the under seat clearance for cleaning, maintenance and preserves other vehicle features.

Each of the components **411-419** of the frame assembly **410**, illustratively, are either stamped, in the case of the posts **411** and **412**, the sideforms **413** and **414**, and the rails **415**, **417** and **418**, or rolled and seam welded, in the case of the tubes **416** and **419**, from high-strength, low-alloy steel. Those skilled in the art, however, will realize that any portion of the frame assembly **410**, the floor mount assembly **430**, or the wall mount assembly **437** may be made from any other suitable metallic, non-metallic, or composite material, or combination thereof, using any manufacturing method appropriate to the material being used. For example, aluminum, titanium, KEVLAR, plastic, wood, bamboo, or resin may be used.

FIGS. **18**, **21**, **25**, and **28** depict various aspects of restraint member or panel **440**. Illustratively, restraint member **440** has a generally rectangular to square shape and is vacuum formed from twin sheets of plastic, such as, for example, high density polyethylene or other suitable plastic, including lightweight plastics, resulting in a hollow-shelled, structural restraint member or panel **440** having energy absorbing properties as will be explained. The restraint panel **440** includes a forwardly facing front surface **441** (FIGS. **18** and **28**) and opposite thereto a rearwardly facing rear surface **442** (FIG. **21**) with a generally hollow core **460** therebetween (FIG. **25**) and a number of recesses and grooves defined therein and configured to impart rigidity to selected regions of the panel **440**. The top and side portions of forwardly facing surface **441** are generally coplanar with portions of the surface **441** being formed to include a number of recesses and protrusions. The panel's formation to define therein a number of recesses configured to selectively impart rigidity to the panel **440** will be further explained below.

Referring to FIG. **18**, the forwardly facing surface **441** is formed to include recessed vertical side channels **451** and **452** and recessed lateral top channel **453**, which surround one or more generally rectangular protrusions **464** formed in the central portion of the forwardly facing surface **441**, and which are configured optionally to receive a seat back frame member or assembly **510**, and/or a built-in child restraint

system or integrated child seat or restraint assembly **605** as will be explained. The top channel **453** extends horizontally and is bounded horizontally along its top by inner top wall **455** and intermittently on its bottom by one of the protrusions **464**. Outer top wall **456**, which illustratively is the topmost portion of restraint member **440**, is spaced apart from and is generally parallel to inner top wall **455**. Top walls **455**, **456**, which generally extend horizontally across the substantial length of the top of the restraint panel **440**, are generally perpendicular to the forwardly and rearwardly facing surfaces **441**, **442**. As described, top walls **455**, **456** and forwardly and rearwardly facing surfaces **441**, **442** define a portion of a head zone **461** (FIG. **21**) having a hollow core **460** (FIG. **25**) with a substantially rectangular cross section. It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art that the extent of the head zone **461** is determined by the size of the vehicle occupants as will be explained and as depicted in FIG. **17**.

Inner side walls (FIGS. **18** and **25**) vertically bound the ends of lateral channel **453** and the sides of vertical side or seat back frame channels **451**, **452**. The upper ends of vertical side channels **451**, **452** are in overlapping relation with the lateral ends of channel **453** and vice versa. The vertical side channels **451**, **452** extend vertically and are bounded along their outer sides by inner side walls **445** (FIGS. **18** and **25**), which are generally perpendicular and intersect with, inner top wall **455**. Channels **451**, **452** are intermittently bounded along their inner sides by protrusions **464**. Inner side walls are spaced apart from, and are generally parallel to outer side walls **446**. Side walls **445**, **446** generally extend along the substantial vertical length of the sides of the restraint panel **440**, and are generally perpendicular to the forwardly and rearwardly facing surfaces **441**, **442**. As described, respective top walls **445**, **446** and forwardly and rearwardly facing surfaces **441**, **442** define vertically extending and open-ended upright-post channels **447** and **448** (FIGS. **18**, **21**, **25**), which are open at their respective bottom ends and are configured to slidably receive respective posts **411** and **412**. Channels **447**, **448** illustratively have a substantially rectangular cross section and generally define the vertical periphery of the restraint panel **440**, and, as noted, define the outer vertical boundaries of the seat back frame channels **451**, **452**. It will be appreciated, however, that the channels **447**, **448** need not be defined at opposite edges of panel **440**, but rather may be defined adjacent to the opposite panel edges. The channels could also be formed with alternative cross-sections, such as circular or triangular, so long as they are configured to receive the posts **411**, **412**. Moreover, the channels **447**, **448** may but need not be parallel one to the other.

The forward facing surface **441** further includes substantially circular recesses or dimples **449** spaced apart along the length of vertical channels **447**, **448**. These recesses **449** cooperate with outer side wall recesses or indentations **443**, inner side wall recesses or indentations **465** and rearward facing surface recesses or indentations **450** (FIG. **21**) to guide into their respective channels **447**, **448**, to nestle and retain within their respective channels **447**, **448**, and to cushion or protect from impact, as will be explained, posts **411**, **412**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the recesses **443**, **449**, **450** alternatively may be of different shapes including, for example, circular, triangular, quadrilateral, polygonal, paraboloidal, conoidal, etc., and sizes so long as they are configured to guide and nestle the posts **411**, **412**. In addition to the snug fit of the posts **411**, **412** within the channels **447**, **448**, the restraint member **440** optionally may be coupled to the frame assembly **410** by a

connector (not shown) passed through an aperture (not shown) in the restraint member 440 and an aperture 468 in the side form. Such a connector may be a rivet, a screw, a bolt, a nail or other suitable connector.

The forwardly facing surface 441 further includes a plurality of recesses 444, which, illustratively, are generally oblong in shape and spaced apart along the bottom portion of the restraint member 440 (FIG. 18). It is within the teaching of the scope of this disclosure for the forward facing surface 441 to comprise additional recesses, indentations, protrusions, grooves and the like, such as those that are unspecified but illustrated in FIG. 18. Those skilled in the art will recognize that any grooves, recesses, and indentations, for example the enumerated and described recesses 443, 444, 449, 451–453, form supporting walls, such as for example walls 445 (FIG. 18), and knitting surfaces or walls 459 as best seen in FIGS. 21 and 25, which import upon the restraint member 440 selective rigidity and energy absorbing characteristics in cooperation with complimentary recesses and indentations which comprise the rearward facing portion 442 of the restraint member 440.

Referring to FIG. 21, rearward facing portion 442 includes recesses or indentations 457 and 458, as well as the just discussed indentations 450. Recesses 458 are formed in various shapes, to include rectangular and oblong shapes, and sizes as best seen in FIG. 21. Indentations 457 have a substantially cone shape, but may, like indentations 458, be of varying shapes to include triangular and rectangular, and sizes. As noted above, these recesses 450, 457–459 cooperate to import upon the restraint member 440 selective rigidity and energy absorbing characteristics which may be varied for selected areas or energy absorbing crush zones of the restraint member 440 as dictated by private, industry, or government (local, state, or federal e.g. FMVSS 222) motor vehicle safety standards. More specifically, in addition to the previously described head zone 462, the restraint member 440 further comprises a chest or torso zone 462, and a knee zone 463 (FIG. 21).

Referring to FIGS. 18–21 and 28, seat member or seat pan 470 is depicted. Seat member 470 illustratively has a generally rectangular shape and is formed from a sheet of plastic, such as, for example, high density polyethylene or other suitable plastic, including lightweight plastics, into a concave support seat member 470. As will be explained below, the seat member 470 is formed to define therein a number of recesses configured to selectively impart rigidity to the seat member 470. As best seen in FIGS. 18 and 20, the seat member 470 comprises a rear portion 471 adjacent to the restraint member 470 when the vehicle seat restraint system is assembled, a front portion 472 parallel to and spaced apart from the rear portion 471, an upwardly facing top surface 476, and a downwardly facing bottom surface 477 (FIG. 20) on the concave side opposite the upwardly facing top surface 476. The upwardly top facing surface 476 is formed to include a downwardly extruded buckle aperture or channel 473, and a member of front indentations or recesses 474, side indentations or recesses 475, and channels or grooves 478. The indentations 474, 475 illustratively have a conoid cross section, although any convenient cross-section to include triangular, circular, rectangular and the like may be used. The indentations 474, 475 import selective rigidity and support characteristics to the seat member 470. It will be appreciated that a fewer or greater number of indentations 474, 475 may be provided. Similarly, grooves 478 also provide rigidity to the seat member 470. Rear portion 471 slopes upwardly away from the horizontal plane of the seat member 470 as seen in FIGS. 18 and 20.

Referring to FIG. 20, indentations 474, 475 define in the downwardly facing bottom surface a number of respective front protrusions 484 and side protrusions 485 which extend into the concave portion of the seat member 470. The protrusions 484, 485 include, respectively, grooves or notches 481, 480. Front rail retaining clips 482 are configured to couple or mount the seat member 470 to the seat frame 410 and illustratively are attached by rivets 486 to two of the front protrusions 484. In addition, two of the side protrusions 485, one on each side of the seat member 470, are provided with steel spring retaining clips 483 which also are adapted to couple or mount the seat member 470 to the seat frame 410. Together, the rail retaining clips 482 and the steel spring retaining clips 483 releasably mount the seat member 470 to the frame 410. As best seen in FIG. 21, the buckle mounting bracket 429 passes through channel 473. Upwardly sloping rear portion 471 includes cutouts 487 and a downwardly projecting appendage 488. The downwardly extruded portion of buckle channel 473, which includes a pair of spaced-apart notches 479, also extends into the concave portion of set member 470, and is configured to receive, guide and support optional belt buckles 343 (FIGS. 21 and 28), which are mounted to center cross-strut 419 by bolt 428 threaded through mounting bracket 429 and aperture 422. Alternative couplings, such as rivets, screws, or nails could also be used to mount the buckles 343. The notches 479 are configured to receive and straddle the center cross-strut 419 when the seat member 470 and seat frame assembly 410 are coupled together as will now be explained.

As best seen in FIG. 21, the seat member 470 is illustratively mounted to the seat frame 410 such that the protrusions 484 generally abut or contact front rail 415, with a portion of the front notches 481 positioned adjacent to or over a portion of the top lip 493 of the front rail member 415 and with the rail retaining clips 482 passing under a portion of the top lip 493 of the front member 415 in order to trap the top lip 493 between the retaining clips 482 and their respective protrusion 484. Similarly, the protrusions 485 abut sideforms 413, 414, with a portion of side notches 480 positioned adjacent to or over a portion of the sideforms 413, 414 and with spring retaining clips 483 releasably engaged with slots 439. Thus, the indentations 474, 475 and their respective protrusion portions not only provide rigidity to the seat member 470, but also support it on the frame assembly 410. When so mounted, the front surface 441 of the panel 440 is adjacent the seat member 470.

Referring to FIGS. 15 and 27–29, illustrative cushion and upholstery components which are configured for use with the vehicle seat restraint system 400 are depicted. It will be appreciated that these components are configured for use with any of the prior described embodiments 120, 220, 300 and or any of the embodiments 500, 600, 700 disclosed herein below. Similar to seat 300 previously described in conjunction with FIG. 15, illustratively, seat cushion or other enclosure 386 is affixed to and covers or encloses at least a portion of seat member 470 and seat frame 410, passenger restraint cushion or other enclosure 383 is affixed to and covers or encloses at least a portion of to rear surface restraint member 440 and seat frame 410, and center cushion or other enclosure 384 is affixed to and covers or encloses at least a portion of the front surface restraint member 440 and seat frame 410 (FIGS. 27–29). Slots or apertures 385 are provided in cushion 384 for optional web webs to extend through (FIG. 28). Slots or apertures 377 are provided in cushion 384 for optional anchorage members, such as a rigid D-ring or round bar 34, to extend through (FIG. 28). Cushion 383 is indented to receive cushion 384 and restraint

member 440 (FIG. 28). However, it will be appreciated that cushion 383 could be configured for use with vehicle seat restraint system 400 to envelope restraint member 440 including its forwardly facing surface 441 thereby eliminating the need for cushion 384 in this embodiment 400.

Each of the cushions 383, 384, 386 may include upholstery of any suitable natural or synthetic material, such as various weights of vinyl, cloth or other fabric, leather or plastic for example. Any such upholstery covering cushion 386 may be attached to inner walls 445, 446, 455 of back panel 440; to the sides, the front portion 472 and the appendage 488 of seat member 470, and to upholstery mounts 530 in the various illustrative embodiments incorporating a seat back frame 510 which will be discussed below, as by, for example, pine tree fasteners, snaps, hooks and loops, rivets, glue or other adhesive, or any other suitable fastener. In addition, the cushions 384, 386 alternatively may be generally flat (FIGS. 17, 27, 28), or may have additional padding or bolsters 668 selectively positioned on and relative to the horizontal seat cushion 386 (FIGS. 15, 16, 29), and/or the vertical seat back cushion 383, 384 (FIG. 29). It will be appreciated that such bolsters 668 generally partition a particular seat, for example seat 700, into a number of individual occupant sections and generally add additional comfort and support to the seat while encouraging positioning. The cushions 383, 384, 386 may be fashioned from any suitable material having cushioning characteristics, such as for example foam. The restraint member 440 and the seat pan 470 may be made of other suitable plastics as well as other suitable metallic, non-metallic, or composite materials using any manufacturing process suitable to the material used.

Thus, the vehicle seat restraint system 400 is a modular system comprising the previously described frame assembly 410, one or more floor mount assembly 430 and/or wall mount bracket 437, restraint panel assembly 440, seat pan 470, and cushions 383, 384, 386. Due to the modular nature of the system 400, individual components may be replaced one at a time in the field. For example, the seat pan member 470 may be disengaged from the frame 410 and a new member 470 coupled to the frame 410. Similarly, a new restraint panel assembly 440 could be slid on to the posts 411, 412 after sliding off an old restraint panel 440. So too, a replacement frame assembly 410 could be installed on vehicle and used with the restraint panel 440, seat member 470 and cushions 383, 384, 386 from the assembly 410 being replaced. Such is the nature with the componentry of below systems 500, 600 and 700.

In operation the vehicle seat restraint system 400 supports and restrains an occupant 397 sitting on the seat and restrains an occupant 396 (FIG. 17) located behind the seat restraint system 400 as follows. The seat member 470, typically in conjunction with cushion 386, defines a generally horizontal plane and supports any occupant 396, 397 sitting directly on the upwardly facing top surface 476 or on the cushion 386, which provides additional cushion and support (FIGS. 27-29). Due to the concave nature of the seat member 470, as a force or pressure is applied to the seat member 470, as from the weight or pressure of one or more occupants sitting on the upwardly facing surface 476, the upwardly facing surface 476 flexes or yields and the protrusions 484, 485 rotate outwardly toward and about respective sideforms 413, 414 and front rail member 415. Because the seat member 470 yields and rotates as described, the seat member 470 provides a certain amount of comfort and allows the thickness of cushion 386 either to be reduced relative to a seat member made from, for example, a flat piece of metal, wood, or particle board, or to be eliminated altogether if desired.

Restraint member 440 similarly supports an occupant, while allowing for reduced foam cushioning. Panel 440 with posts 411, 412 received within respective channels 447, 448 defines a seat back substantially in a generally vertical plane and typically in conjunction with cushion 384 provides support for the back of an occupant 396, 397 sitting on the seat member 470 and leaning back against restraint panel 440 or cushion 384. Forward facing surface 441 in general and the protrusions 464 in specific support the occupant directly or support the cushion 384 and the occupant. The rearwardly facing surface 442 of restraint member 440 typically in conjunction with rearwardly facing surface 388 of cushion 383 provides cushioning and restraint for an occupant 396, 397 sitting in any seat behind the rearwardly facing surfaces 388, 442. As with the seat member 470, the construction of the restraint member 440, with its yieldable plastic and hollow inner core, allows the thickness of cushions 384, 389 to be reduced, or perhaps even eliminated. Similarly, the construction of the restraint member 440 allows for the vertical portion of the frame assembly to comprise the upright posts 411, 412 without any type of upper cross-member or sheet metal which otherwise typically is encased in thick foam. Rather, the restraint member 440 provides sufficient support for the cushion 384, the upright posts 411, 412 and an occupant of the seat while providing sufficient restraint characteristics for an occupant behind the seat. The previously described channels 451-453 and associated walls 445, 446 along with the various protrusions 464, recesses, indentations and notches 443, 444, 449, 450, 457-459 provide rigidity to the restraint member and define respective head, chest and knee crush zones 461, 462, 463. The restraint member 440 is compliant with the passive restraint requirements of FMVSS 222 as will now be explained.

The longitudinally oriented row or system of seats 398 depicted in FIG. 17 is illustrative of seat system 400 similarly oriented. The cushion 383 together with enclosed frame 410 and restraint member 440 form a passenger restrainer for an unbelted passenger 396 or a belted passenger 397 sitting in any seat 300, 400 situated behind any other seat 400. Therefore, as explained above, when a passenger 396, 397 sitting behind a seat 400 applies a force forwardly toward rearwardly facing surface 388 of seat 400, as in the event of a forward-impact crash, then the restraint member 440 and perhaps the upright posts 411, 412 deform, thereby absorbing at least a portion of the energy of the forwardly moving passenger 396, 397. The phantom rendition of cushion 383 in FIG. 17 depicts the cushion 383 prior to contact by the forwardly moving passenger 396.

Thus, in operation, when a forwardly directed force is applied to the rearward facing portion of cushion 388, the restraint system 400 will deform to absorb and dissipate at least a portion of the force. For example, when a passenger or occupant 396 in a seat disposed behind (FIG. 17) a seat 400 equipped with restraint member 440 is forced forwardly, as by the occupant's vehicle crashing into a vehicle in front of the occupant's vehicle, into the rearward facing portion 388 of cushion 383 and continuing into the rearward facing portion of restraint member 440, the restraint member 440 deforms or yields at the point of impact to absorb at least a portion of the energy generated by the forward movement of the occupant 396. Depending on the amount of energy generated, the restraint member may continue to deform beyond the point of impact and eventually transfers the load to the upright posts 411, 412. Upright posts 411, 412 are sufficiently rigid to hold the restraint member 440 in a generally vertical position, but sufficiently weak to deform

when sufficient force is applied thereto in compliance with the passive restraint deformability standards of FMVSS 222. Therefore, upright posts **411**, **412** will deform, for example by bending or twisting, and further absorb and transfer at least a portion of any remaining energy to the floor mount assembly **430**, which in turn will absorb and dissipate at least a portion of any remaining energy. Finally, any remaining energy would be transferred to and dissipated by the floor of the vehicle, and/or, if a wall mount **437** is used, the side wall of the vehicle.

In addition to restraining any rearward occupant **396** by generally absorbing and dissipating the energy of a forward moving occupant **396**, the restraint member **440** protects the occupant **396** in the specified energy absorbing crush zones **461**, **462**, **463** through the use of recesses. Illustratively, the protrusions and recesses adjacent to the bottom of panel **440**, which is opposite to top wall **456** of the panel **440** and which is movably adjacent seat member **470**, define in the rear surface **442** a knee crush zone **465** with a particular energy absorbing characteristic. For example, recesses **450** not only guide and retain the posts **411**, **412** in channels **447**, **448**, but also cushion the area so that an occupant's knees do not impact the posts **411**, **412**. Similarly, recesses **457** are located and constructed so as to provide impact protection between an occupant's knees and a seat back frame **510** which will be described below. Also, recesses **444** are positioned and constructed to provide impact protection between an occupant's knees and the lower portions of frame **410** as well as the lower portions of the to-be-discussed seat back frame **510**. The top walls **455**, **456** and forward and rearward facing surfaces **441**, **442** adjacent the top of the panel **440** cooperate with each other and with the recesses **458** generally to define the head crush zone, which not only restrains an occupant's head, but also provides protection between the occupant **396** and a top cross-bar member **514** of the to-be-discussed seat back frame **510**. The head crush zone may have energy absorbing characteristic different from that of the knee crush zone. In the event of a rear impact, an occupant **397** sitting on seat member **470** would be forced rearwardly into the restraint member **440**, which similarly would deform to absorb some of the energy of the rearward moving occupant **397**, and, depending on the amount of energy generated, would transfer any excess energy or load to the posts **411**, **412**, which in turn would deform and transfer any further excess energy to the floor mount assembly **430**. In addition, because the restraint member **440** envelopes the upright posts **411**, **412**, restraint and frame **410** impact protection is provided for impacts with the side of the restraint member **440**, for example, from a person standing or walking down the vehicle's aisle, or from a person sitting in a seat lateral or oblique to the restraint member **440**. The chest crush zone **462** would be located between the head **461** and knee **463** crush zones and may have energy absorbing characteristics that may differ from either of the head **461** or knee **463** zone characteristics, all as established by the applicable standard, such as for example a private standard or a governmental standard such as FMVSS 222.

It will be appreciated that although the crush zones **461**–**463** have specific names, such as head zone **461**, chest zone **462** and knee zone **463**, the occupant's body part that is actually restrained or protected can vary depending on the size and orientation of the occupant **396** as partially illustrated in FIG. 17. Those skilled in the art will also appreciate that the restraint member **440** and the seat member **470** could be configured for use with the previously described systems **120**, **220**, **300** or with existing conventional vehicle seats.

In the below embodiments **500**, **600**, **700**, similar passive energy management and dissipation will take place when a rearwardly directed force is applied to cushion **384**, as when an occupant **396**, **397** is forced against cushion **384** as in a rear impact. In such a case, the cushion **384** and restraint member **440** again will absorb at least a portion of the energy generated by the rearward movement of the occupant **396**, **397**. Depending on the amount of energy generated, the restraint member may continue to yield beyond the point of impact and eventually transfers the load to the upright posts **411**, **412**, which will yield as described above and further transfer at least a portion of any remaining energy to the floor mount assembly **430**, which in turn will dissipate at least a portion of any remaining energy.

As best seen in FIGS. 22 and 28, another embodiment of a vehicle restraint system **500**, illustratively configured for use with passengers or occupants **396**, **397** ranging in size from infants to children to adults or any combinations thereof, is depicted. Vehicle restraint seat system **500** comprises the previously described frame assembly **410**, floor mount assembly **430**, restraint member **440**, seat member **470**, passenger restraint cushion **383**, center cushion **384**, and seat cushion **386**, all of which are constructed and operate substantially as explained above with respect to system **400**. Accordingly, only those aspects of seat system **500** which differ from seat system **400** will now be described.

Vehicle restraint system **500** further comprises a seat back frame **510**, one or more restraint web belts or harnesses **336** and an optional height-adjuster guide belt **376** and associated height adjuster **58**. Seat back frame **510** illustratively comprises a pair of spaced-apart and parallel vertical upright members or tubes **511**, **512**, a top cross-bar member **514**, a bottom cross-bar member **515** which is spaced apart from and generally parallel to top crossbar **514**, and a pair of open-faced box construction assemblies **524**. One box construction **524** is coupled to the upper end of upright member **511** and one end of top cross-member **514**. The other box construction **524** is coupled to the upper end of upright member **512** and another end of top cross-member **514**. Opposing ends of bottom cross-bar member **515** are coupled one each to the respective lower ends of the upright members **511**, **512**. As assembled, cross-bars **514**, **515** are generally perpendicular to and sandwiched between upright members **511**, **512** thereby giving seat back frame **510** a generally square to rectangular shape. Each of the components **511**, **512**, **514**, **515**, **524** of the seat back frame **510** illustratively are coupled together using spot welds, although other couplings may be used such as seam welding, rivets, bolts, screws and the like.

Illustratively, each of the upright members **511**, **512** have a generally rectangular to ovate cross-section and are formed by rolling a high-strength, low-alloy steel, which is then seam welded to form the tubes **511**, **512**. The upright members **511**, **512** each may include a plate or mounting member **530** configured to mount any upholstery covering cushion **384** and further includes apertures **518**, **519** configured to mount the frame **510** to a pivot mechanism **540** (FIG. 24). Bottom cross-bar member **515** also has a generally rectangular to ovate cross-section and is formed by rolling and seam welding. It is illustratively fashioned out of low-carbon steel and includes anchorage mounting areas **534** configured to mount anchorages **34**, such as for example a round bar or D-ring which may be compliant with FMVSS 225, and apertures **590** configured to mount a retractor **692** as will be explained. Anchorages **34**, illustratively, are configured to transfer to the vehicle structure any loads

generated by a child restraint system or other restraint system coupled to the anchorages, and are welded to the mounting areas **534**, although alternative coupling methods may be used. Top cross-bar member **514** is illustratively stamped from stainless steel to form a generally rotated V-shaped member. The box construction **524** is stamped from a high-strength, low-alloy steel. It will be appreciated that the upright members **511**, **512**, the cross-members **514**, **515**, and the box construction may be made of any other suitable metallic, nonmetallic, or composite material by any method of manufacture suitable for the material being used.

Each box construction assembly **524** is configured to mount restraint harness webs **336**, **376** and formed to include an open face, an open bottom, upper and lower side apertures **525**, **526**, and front apertures **528** (FIG. 24). Upper aperture **525** is configured to receive bearing member **393**. A movable member or roller member **399** is configured to fit over bearing member **393** to facilitate movement of belt **336** over bearing member **393**. Lower aperture **526** is adapted to receive mounting member **394**. Illustratively, bearing member **393** and mounting member **394** have a circular cross-section and may be, for example, a pin, peg, dowel, or spindle, although other mounting pieces of suitable shape and size may be utilized.

Referring to FIG. 22, restraint harness **336** optionally is affixed or mounted on either or both sides of frame **410** and seat back frame **510** as follows. A web retractor **374** is attached via apertures **421** to rear tubular member **416** using any suitable coupling, such as a bolt, rivet or screw, etc. (FIG. 22). A suitable retractor **374**, for example, is an RLS-80 Retractor available from Indiana Mills & Manufacturing, Inc. under part number A35021. The retractor houses web belt **336**, which extends upwardly away therefrom and through an optional web guide **531** (FIG. 21). The optional web guide **531** is mounted to seat back frame **510**, vertically extending between box construction **524** and bottom crossbar member **515**, and is configured to encase and guide web **336** to and from the retractor **374**. In the alternative, seat frame channels **451**, **452** are also configured to guide web **336** to and from the web retractor **374**. In either event, web **336** continues upwardly and around movable member **399** which encases bearing member **393** (FIG. 24) and outwardly through slot **63** in bezel plate **354** (FIG. 22). Web **336** continues downwardly from the bezel plate **354** until its distal end attaches to frame assembly **410** using web mounting plate **427** and bolt **428**, or other suitable coupling such as a screw, rivet or nail. Tongue **342** is slidably mounted to web **336** and is lockingly engagable with buckle **343**, in turn attached by buckle mounting member **429** and bolt **428**, or other suitable coupling, to cross-strut member **419**. Mounting member **429** illustratively is a metal plate, although other suitable non-metallic or composite members, such as a length of web, could be used to couple the buckle **343** to cross-strut **419**. An optional guide web **376** is also mounted by web mounting plate **427** and bolt **428** or other suitable coupling to frame assembly **410** at either of the sideforms **413**, **414**. Web **376** extends from mounting plate **427** upwardly through slot **66**, around mounting member **394** and back on itself in order to mount to mounting member **394** by, for example, stitching, melting, glue, hook and loop, snaps, or other suitable coupling means. Restraints **336** and **376** may be affixed or mounted to the seat frame **410** and seat back frame member **510** in other suitable ways as well. For example, the web **336** may proceed downwardly from bearing member **393** and through an aperture in mounting plate **427** and then upwardly away therefrom and back on itself for stitching to itself, with the end of web **376**

distal from mounting member **394** sandwiched and stitched between the two portions of web **336**.

Height adjuster **58** is slidably mounted to and associates together restraint harness webs **336** and **376**. Height adjuster **58** is configured to associate belts **336** and **376** and slides up and down their length to adjust the position of the belts **336** and **376** about the occupant's shoulder. As depicted on the right side of seat back frame **510** illustrated in FIG. 22, when tongue **342** and buckle **343** are releasably and lockingly engaged, they form a three-point restraint system. Referring to the left side of FIG. 27 and the right side of FIG. 29, then, engaging the tongue **342** and the buckle **343** forces the web **336** across the torso and the lap of an occupant **397** (FIG. 17) in order to restrain the occupant and maintain the occupant in a secured relation with the frame **410** and the seat back frame **510** upon impact of the vehicle. Restraint **336** therefore comprises a lap portion **345** and a torso or chest portion **395**. Other conventional web restraint systems fall within the scope of this disclosure.

Referring to FIGS. 23 and 24, pivot mechanism **540** comprises strut **542** and a pair of spaced-apart plates **548**, **549**. Strut **542**, illustratively is formed from any suitable metallic material into a generally elongated but elbow-like shape and formed to include a notch **543**, a stop portion or shoulder **547**, and apertures **544**–**546**. Each plate **548**, **549** is formed from any suitable metallic material into a generally L-shaped piece including a plurality of apertures **550**–**552** and an arcuate slot or channel **553**. The strut **542** is movably coupled to and sandwiched between the plates **548**, **549** as follows. A rivet **556** passes through aperture **552** of each plate **548**, **549** and through aperture **545** of strut **542** to movably mount the strut **542** to the plates **548**, **549**. Each strut **542** moves on rivet **556** about its axis **560**. Movement of strut **542** relative to plates **548**, **549** is restricted, as will be explained, by the restraint member **440** and by a frangible retaining member or shear pin **558**, which passes through the channel **553** of each plate **548**, **549** and through aperture **546** of strut **542**. Shear pin **558**, which illustratively will yield or shear under a force of about 700 pounds, is held in position by cotter or bridge pin **559**. Hollow mounting rivets **557** pass through apertures **550**, **551** in each of the plates to further couple the plates **548**, **549** together. It will be appreciated that other frangible stop means may be used such as described above.

As noted above, the pivot mechanism includes axis **560** (FIG. 22) generally defined through solid rivet **556** (FIGS. 22 and 23). As best seen in FIG. 23, in the normal configuration the shear pin **558** is disposed in the lower end of arcuate channel **553** thereby restricting forward movement **561** (FIG. 22) of the strut **542** relative to the plates **548**, **549**. When sufficient forwardly force is applied to the strut **542**, the shear pin ruptures and allows the strut to move in a forwardly direction **561** (FIG. 22) about axis **560** until the stop portion **547** contacts the rivet **557** disposed in stop aperture **551** as shown in phantom in FIG. 23. Thus, the maximum angle **562** of forward travel between the normal position **563** of the strut's longitudinal axis and its forwardmost position **564** substantially is determined by the configuration and disposition of the stop portion **547** and the stop aperture **551**. It is desirable for this angle of movement, typically a pivot angle **562**, to be an acute angle. For example, an angle of between about 10 to 22 degrees is desirable. It may be more desirable to have a pivot angle of about 15 degrees. When a rearwardly directed force is applied to the strut **542**, the strut **542** moves rearwardly about axis **560** as the shear pin **558** moves to the upper end of the arcuate channel until the shear pin contacts the end of

the channel 553. Depending on the magnitude of the rearwardly directed force, the shear pin 558 will either halt the rearward movement of the strut 542 upon making contact with the end of the channel, or will rupture, allowing the strut to continue to move rearwardly about the axis 560 until the strut 542 contacts (not shown) the opposite side of rivet 557. As will be explained, this rearward movement is modified somewhat when the pivot mechanism 540 is integrated into the restraint system 500.

The integration of the pivot mechanism 540 will now be described. As best seen in FIG. 24, the seat back frame member or assembly 510 is coupled to the pivot mechanism 540 by slipping the upright members 511, 512 over the struts 542 until a spring pin 520, which is lodged in apertures 518 in each upright 511, 512, makes contact with notch 543. The spring pin 520 defines the degree to which the struts 542 may be inserted within the uprights 511, 512, and thereby aligns aperture 519 in each upright member 511, 512 with aperture 544 in each respective strut 542. Self-tapping bolt 521 is inserted through aligned aperture 519 in respective upright member 511, 512 and aperture 544 in each strut to couple together the seat back frame 510 and the pivot mechanism 540. The strut 542 and the plates 548, 549 are non-handed, in that plate 548 is interchangeable with plate 549, and the pivot mechanism 540 may be mounted either to right upright member 511 or to left upright member 512. It will be appreciated that the plates 548, 549 and the strut 542 may be made from any suitable metallic, non-metallic, or composite material using any manufacturing method suitable to the chosen material. Similarly, the above described couplings could be accomplished with any suitable coupler, such as for example, a bolt, screw, nail, rivet and the like.

Referring to FIGS. 21 and 22, the attaching together of frame assembly 410, via pivot mechanism 540, and seat back frame 510 is depicted. Illustratively, a mounting coupling, such as for example a bolt 567, is inserted through each of the hollow mounting rivets 557 (FIG. 24) and into apertures 423 (FIG. 19) of cross-struts 417, 418. Apertures 423 may be extruded such that no nut is needed. Alternative couplers, such as a rivet, screw, or nut and bolt may be used. When so attached, the seat back frame 510 normally lies substantially in the plane defined by upright members 411, 412 (FIG. 26) and extends through the horizontal plane defined the sideforms 413, 414, it being appreciated the seat back frame 510 could be configured for use with other embodiments described herein. Because frame 510 and pivot mechanism 540 are coupled together, frame 510 is movably attached to frame 410 and will move or pivot in a forwardly direction 561 about axis 560 away from front surface 441 and toward seat member 470 in an amount substantially depicted by angle 562 and relative to frame 410 upon a vehicle impact of sufficient severity. The front surface 441 of restraint panel 440 is configured to receive therein the seat back frame 510.

Referring to FIGS. 21, 25 and 28, when seat back frame 510 is in its normal position, it is disposed adjacent to and forward of restraint member 440 with upright members 511, 512 generally disposed within respective channels 447, 448 and top crossbar member 514 generally disposed within channel 453. It will be appreciated therefore, that the previously described rearward movement of the struts 542, and hence the seat back frame 510, initially is restricted by the restraint member 440 as supported by upright posts 411, 412. As previously described, the restraint member 440 is formed with indentations and recesses, for example cone indentations 457, that cushion the frame 510 from impact. Substantially as previously described with seat system 400,

cushions 383, 384, 386 also cushion and support passengers and cushion the frame 510 and the other components of seat system 500 as illustrated, for example in FIGS. 27 and 29. Cushion 384 covers the front surface 441 and seat back frame 510. However, as best seen in FIG. 28, in seat system 500 cushion 384 is further configured to enclose frame 510 and move substantially as a unit therewith in substantially the same manner as depicted and described in FIGS. 16 and 17, and as will now be explained further.

The longitudinally oriented row or system of seats 398 depicted in FIG. 17 is illustrative of seat systems 500 similarly oriented. As described with seat restraint system 400, which is included within seat system 500 and operates substantially in the same manner therein, the cushion 383 together with enclosed frame 410 and restraint member 440 form a passenger restrainer for an unbelted passenger 396 or a belted passenger 397 sitting in any seat 300, 400, 500 situated behind any other seat 500. Therefore, as explained above, when a passenger 396, 397 sitting behind a seat 500 applies a force forwardly toward rearwardly facing surface 388 of seat 500, as for example in the event of a forward-impact crash, then the restraint member 440 and perhaps the upright posts 411, 412 deform, thereby absorbing at least a portion of the energy of the forwardly moving passenger 396, 397.

As previously explained, and as represented by FIGS. 16 and 17, if a forwardly moving passenger 397 is wearing a seat belt restraint 336, then the force of a crash will lock the deceleration-sensing retractors 374 and move the passenger 397 against web belt 336 with force sufficient to rupture shear pin 558, or other frangible retaining means known to one skilled in the art, allowing seat back frame 510 and associated enclosing cushion 384 to pivot forwardly independent of frame 410 and restraint member 440 until a stop mechanism, such as the stop portion 547 of each strut 542 contacting the rivet 557, stops the forward movement of seat back frame 510 and cushion 384. As previously noted, although the belt 336 absorbs some of the passenger's 397 forward momentum, it will be appreciated that, depending on the size of belted passenger 397 and the force that passenger 397 applies on the web 336, the passenger 397 may or may not impact surface 388 in a crash. It will also be appreciated that the frangible retaining means 558 may be designed to rupture at varying amounts of force other than the illustrative 700 pounds noted above. The illustrative 700 pounds typically may be generated by a six-year old of average weight being moved by a frontal impact forwardly against a web 336 of an engaged 3-point restraint system. Also, because the forward movement of frame 510 and cushion 384 is independent of frame 410 and restraint member 440, frame 410, restraint member 440 and associated cushion 383 remain in place to absorb at least a portion of the energy of a passenger 396 or 397, whether belted or not, sitting in the seat behind the seat of a belted passenger 397. The phantom rendition of cushion 383 in FIG. 17 depicts the cushion 383 prior to contact by the forwardly moving passenger 396.

Seat restraint system 500 will not cause substantial additional stiffness to the seat back when the occupant of seat 500 is unbelted or the seat 500 is unoccupied and thus, maintains the passive energy management capability embodied in seat 400 for any occupant 396, 397 located behind seat 500. Thus, if a passenger 396 is not wearing a belt 336, then a crash will not force the passenger 396 against the web 336 and the retaining means 558 will therefore not break. In such a case, seat back frame 510 and cushion 384 will remain substantially within restraint mem-

ber 440 and cushion 383 thereby pivoting forwardly with restraint member 440 and upright posts 411, 412 and cushion 383 in the event that a passenger sitting behind impacts the rearwardly facing surface 388. Similarly, if a passenger is sitting behind an empty seat 500 and applies forward pressure against the rearwardly facing surface 388 of that empty seat, then frame 510 and cushion 384 will remain substantially within restraint member 440 and cushion 383 and will not substantially impede the movement of, but rather, will move forward with, restraint member 440 and upright posts 411, 412. Neither will the frame 510 and cushion 383 substantially impede rearward movement of the restraint panel 440 when the restrained or unrestrained occupant is forced rearward into the seat back during impact. Rather, the seat back frame 510 and cushion 384 will remain substantially within restraint member 440 and cushion 383 and will not substantially impede any rearwardly movement of, but rather will move rearwardly with, restraint member or panel 440 and upright posts 411, 412 in the event of a passenger being forced against cushion 384 by a rear impact crash of sufficient force. Moreover, once a rearwardly directed force is applied to the seat back frame 510, the frame 510 will move rearwardly without adding appreciable resistance to the coincident rearward movement because of the fact that the arcuate shaped channel 553 allows the shear pin 558 to move freely therein until reaching the end of the channel 553. If the rearward force is sufficient to move the seat back frame 510 and restraint member 440 rearwardly such that illustrative shear pin 558 moves to the upper portion of channel 553, then the shear pin will break with any force in excess of said sufficient force and continue rearwardly until stopped as described above, or by upright posts 411, 412.

As just described, seat restraint system 500 maintains the passive restraint characteristics of seat restraint system 400 and combines it with the active restraint characteristics offered by the harness 336 and movable seat back frame 510. As with seat restraint system 400, the seat restraint system 500 also preserves the under seat clearance for cleaning, maintenance and other vehicle features. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the seat back frame 510 and harness 336 could be configured for use with the previously described systems 120, 220, 300 or with existing vehicle seats.

FIGS. 24–27 and 29, depict another embodiment of the invention. Vehicle seat restraint system 600 comprises the previously described frame assembly 410, vehicle mounts 430, 437, restraint member 440, seat member 470, passenger restraint cushion 383, center cushion 384, seat cushion 386, seat back frame 510, one or more restraint web belts 336, and the optional height-adjuster guide belt 376 and associated height adjuster 58, all of which are constructed and operate in conjunction with vehicle seat restraint system 600 substantially as explained above with respect to vehicle seat restraint system 500. Accordingly, only those aspects of seat system 600 which differ from seat system 500 will now be described.

Seat restraint system 600 further comprises an integrated child seat or built-in child restraint system 605, which illustratively is configured to restrain a child ranging in size from about 17 to 55 pounds. Referring to FIG. 24, a seat back frame 510 is illustrated showing portions of two child restraint systems 605. As best seen in FIGS. 24–26, integrated child restraint system 605 comprises a child restraint harness 636, a child-restraint harness support crossbar 610, a child restraint harness mounting back member 612, a seat base or portion 613, a retractor 692, a release mechanism or cable 696, upper cushion cut-out portion 616, and lower

cushion cut-out portion 617 (FIGS. 27 and 29). Support crossbar or transverse bar 610 and back member 612 are provided on seat back frame 510 and are configured, in cooperation with seat base 613, to mount and support a portion of the child restraint harness 636 between the seat back frame 510 and the seat base 613 (FIGS. 24–26). Transverse bar 610 is affixed to opposite ends of this seat back frame member 510 and may be disposed in another horizontal channel 454 formed in restraint member 440. It will be appreciated that the front surface 441 of panel 440 is configured to receive therein seat base 613 and back member 612, but may have to be modified as would be apparent to and within the capacity of one skilled in the art in order to accommodate the back member 612.

As best seen in FIG. 24, seat base 613 illustratively is formed from plastic into a generally square shape having crotch-web guide aperture 646 and crotch-belt mounting apertures 647. Additional apertures may be formed around the periphery of the seat base 613 and configured to attach upholstery. It will be appreciated that seat base 613 may be of other sizes and shapes and fashioned out of any other suitable metallic, non-metallic, or composite material. A mounting plate 656 is mounted to each side of the seat base 613 distal from the crotch aperture 646. Each mounting plate 656 is coupled by pivot pin 661 to respective pivot brackets 660 mounted to bottom crossbar member 515 of seat back frame 510, and includes an ear 658 having a belt guide aperture 659. Brackets 660 may be mounted to the bottom crossbar member 515 by any suitable coupling including, for example, rivets, nuts and bolts, welding, screws, nails, snaps, and pine-tree fasteners. Thus, seat member 613 is movably mounted to seat back frame 510 adjacent its seat member 470, illustratively pivoting about pivot pins 661 relative to seat back frame 510. For example, FIGS. 24 and 25 show the seat base in an up or retracted position, with its upwardly facing surface adjacent and generally parallel to back member 612 (FIG. 25). FIG. 24 further shows an additional seat base 613, only in the down or extended position, wherein its upwardly facing surface is generally perpendicular to back member 612. FIG. 27 illustratively depicts the seat base 613 in transition between the retracted and extended positions moving for example downwardly toward the adjacent seat member 470 to form a child seat.

Referring to FIGS. 24–27, restraint harness 636 is affixed to seat base 613 and to seat back frame 510 and comprises coupling assembly 630 and one or more restraint webs conceptually divided into two shoulder portions 637, 638, two back portions 639, 640, a transition portion 641, retractor portion 642, two lap portions 643, 644, transition portion 648, and a crotch portion 645. Retractor 692 operatively houses web portion 642, which proceeds upwardly away therefrom and is coupled to transition portion 641. Back portions 639, 640 are coupled to opposite ends of transition portion 641 and proceed upwardly away therefrom and up and over transverse cross-bar 610 and through inverted T-shaped mounting apertures or slots 650 in mounting back member 612 (FIG. 26). Shoulder or torso portions 637, 638 proceed downwardly away from mounting back member 612 and through respective tongues 631, 632 (FIG. 27), which are slidingly disposed on the web. Lap portions 643, 644 proceed downwardly away from the tongues 631, 632 and through respective guide apertures 659 formed in ears 658 included in flange 657 of mounting plate 656 on the bottom of seat portion 613 (FIGS. 24–25). Once under seat portion 613, the lap portions 643, 644 are coupled by transition portion 648 (FIG. 25). It will be appreciated by those skilled in the art, that the web portions could be one

or more webs coupled together, or, excluding retractor portion **642**, could be a single web in an endless loop. A crotch belt or web **645** is mounted at one end to seat base **613** by looping through apertures **647** back on itself for coupling by, for example, stitching, or other suitable means such as hook and loop, glue, cement, rivets, or melting. Alternatively, the web **645** may loop back and be coupled (not shown) to the transition portion **648** as by, for example stitching. The other end of crotch web **645** is connected to a buckle **632** (FIG. 27).

When the seat base is in the retracted position, the crotch belt generally hangs loosely from the apertures **647** (FIG. 25). When the seat base **613** is in the extended position, the crotch web **645** extends from the apertures **647** up through the generally T-shaped guide aperture **646**. The coupling assembly **630** comprises the tongues **631**, **632** and the buckle **632**, which are lockingly and releasably engageable with one another. A suitable coupling assembly is, for example, an CBRX-HS system available from Indiana Mills & Manufacturing, Inc. under part number A30950B. As just described, the restraint harness **636** comprises a five-point restraint harness system which maintains an occupant of the child seat secured to seat base **613** and to seat back frame member **510** upon impact of the vehicle. It will be appreciated that a four-point restraint system or other multiple-point harness restraining system falls within the teaching of the embodiment. Such systems **605** are typically configured for child occupants weighing in a range of about 17 to 55 pounds for use with the restraint harness **636**. Because the restraint harness **636** is mounted to the seat back frame **510**, if an occupant of the child restraint system **605** were thrown against the harness **636** with sufficient force, as would occur for example in a crash, then the seat back frame **510** and cushion **384** would move forwardly about the axis **560** as described for seat system **500** above, while leaving in place the restraint member **440**, and the upright posts **411**, **412**. Otherwise, the operation and functioning of the seat back frame **510** and the restraint member **440**, etc. are as described above in conjunction with seat system **500**.

Referring to FIG. 27, the embodiment of FIG. 24 is shown with the cushions **383**, **384**, **386** operationally attached as previously described for restraint systems **400** and **500**. Shown in phantom on the left side of FIG. 27 are the cushion cut-out portions **616**, **617** of cushion **384** affixed to the retracted seat base **613** shown on the left side of the seat in FIG. 24. More specifically, upper cushion **616**, having an inwardly facing surface **619**, and lower cushion **617** are substantially square to rectangular in shape and are adjacent one to the other, coupled by, for example a fabric hinge **618**, which may be created by upholstering the cutouts **616**, **617** with a single piece of upholstery as known to those skilled in the art. In operation, upper cushion **616** folds or pivots about hinge **618** down over lower cushion **617**, with its normally outwardly facing surface adjacent to the normally outwardly facing surface of cushion **617**. Next, the substantially coextensive cushions **616**, **617** continue to pivot downwardly about pivot pin **561** until the normally inwardly facing surface **619** of upper cushion **616** is resting upon cushion **386**. In this extended configuration, the restraint harness **630** is deployed for operational use on an occupant, and the depth of the deployed cushion portions **616**, **617**, extending from the seat bight outwardly away therefrom, is illustratively about 12 to 13 inches, it being appreciated that the depth of the cushion portions could be lesser or greater. In the restraint system's **605** retracted position, the seat base **613** is received within the cushion **384** and the seat back frame **510**, the cushion cut-out portions are stowed in a

generally flush relationship with the rest of cushion **384** and the restraint harness **630** is stowed beneath the cushion portions **616**, **617** as seen in the left side of the seat in FIG. 27 and the left side of the seat depicted in FIG. 29. It will be appreciated that portions of the restraint system **605** may also be received within the back panel **440**, or that the thickness of the back panel may be modified as necessary and as within the ken of one skilled in the art. Those skilled in the art will realize that the cushion cut-out portions could be fashioned, stowed, and/or deployed in other suitable ways.

It will be appreciated that the seat base **613** may also be deployed and configured in a booster-seat mode to support an occupant for use with the vehicle's restraint system. In such a booster-seat configuration, the occupant, which may weigh in excess of about 40 pounds, would use the vehicle's restraint system, for example three-point restraint web **336**, while harness **636** remains stowed behind the occupant. In addition, with the seat base **613** in the stowed position, an occupant may be supported on cushion **386** in a number of alternative ways. For example, an occupant may sit directly on cushion **386** and/or seat member **470** and use restraint web **336** (FIG. 17). In another configuration, an add-on child restraint system such as a booster seat or a portable child restraint seat may be supported on the seat portions **386**, **470** (FIGS. 39, 40, 45), as is also the case with seat **500**, with seat base **613** in the stowed position. The portable child restraint seat, which may have its own restraint system **460** (FIGS. 39-40), illustratively would be releasably coupled using one or more anchorages **32**, **34**, **136**, **236**, **670**, **770**, **870**, **970**, alone or in combination as described herein below, and would typically be for use with an occupant weighing less than about 55 pounds. It may be desirable to mount the portable child restraint seat **10e**, as for example in the case where the child occupant weighs less than about 20 pounds, in a rear facing orientation such that the occupant faces in the direction opposite to the normal direction of travel of the vehicle (FIG. 45). Similarly, the add-on child restraint booster seat (not shown) would be for use with an occupant weighing less than about 55 pounds. In addition, an unrestricted booster seat (not shown) configured for use with an occupant weighing in excess of about 40 pounds may be supported on the seat portions **386**, **470**. In all events, whether the booster seat is configured as seat base **613**, is configured as said add-on child restraint booster seat, or is configured as said unrestricted booster seat, the booster seat will be configured for use with the vehicle's restraint web **336**. It will be appreciated that any combination of the above fall within the scope of the invention. For example, on a single seat **600**, **700**, a first occupant, for example a child, may be supported on seat base **613**, a second occupant, for example an adult, may be supported directly on seat portions **386**, **470**, and a third occupant, for example an infant or another child, may be supported in an add-on child restraint system which in turn is supported on seat portions **386**, **470**. Illustratively, the add-on child restraint system may be a portable child seat for use with an infant or child, or it may be a booster seat for use with a child. As noted, a positioning harness could also be used in conjunction with the restraint harness **336**.

A suitable retractor **692** illustratively is an ALR 1.5 Cable-Actuated Retractor available from Indiana Mills & Manufacturing, Inc. under part number A30952 and disclosed in U.S. Pat. No. 5,380,066. Such a retractor **692** is a positive locking retractor that must be released by a release mechanism. FIGS. 25 and 27 illustratively depict a release tab **696**, which is attached to cable **693** which proceeds

through back member **612** at aperture or housing **695** formed in the back member **612** and proceeds through bracket **694** downwardly to retractor **692** (FIG. **26**). Pulling on tab **696** releases the retractor **692**, allowing it to pay out web **642**. A suitable release mechanism as just described, for example, includes a cable web-pull assembly available from Indiana Mills & Manufacturing, Inc. under part number A30954.

As just described, and as with system **500**, seat restraint system **600** maintains the passive restraint characteristics of seat restraint system **400** and combines it with the active restraint characteristics offered by the harness **336**, movable seat back frame **510** and integrated child restraint system **605**. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the integrated child restraint system **605** could be configured for use with the previously described systems **120**, **220**, **300**. It further will be appreciated that the integrated child restraint system **605** is adaptable for use with a conventional seat or with vehicle seat restraint system **400**. However, in such a system the restraint system **605** would have to be mounted on frame **410** or restraint member **440** and the passive energy management and restraint aspects required by FMVSS might be compromised. As with seat restraint systems **400**, **500**, the seat restraint system **600** preserves the under seat clearance for cleaning, maintenance and other vehicle features.

Referring to FIG. **29** another illustrative vehicle seat restraint system **700** is depicted. Seat **700** incorporates all of the structure and function of seat system **600**. FIG. **29** also shows cushion bolsters **668**, which may also be used with any of the seats **120**, **220**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700** depicted and described herein. More specifically, vehicle seat restraint system **700** comprises the previously described frame assembly **410**, mounting assemblies **430**, **437**, restraint member **440**, seat member **470**, passenger restraint cushion **383**, center cushion **384**, seat cushion **386**, seat back frame **510**, a pair of restraint web belts **336**, a pair of height-adjuster guide belts **376** and associated height adjusters **58**, and integrated child restraint system **605**, all of which are constructed and operate in conjunction with vehicle seat **700** substantially as explained above with respect to vehicle seat restraint system **600**. Accordingly, only those aspects of seat system **700** which differ from seat system **600** will now be described.

Seat **700** further comprises one or more upper anchorages or mount systems **32**, **136**, **236** and/or tether anchorages or mount systems **670**, **770**, **870**, **970**, alone or in combination. Illustratively, the upper anchorages **32**, **136**, **236** and tether mount systems or anchorages **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** are mounted to the seat back frame **510** in order to maintain both the passive restraint characteristics of seat **400** and the active restraint characteristics offered by the harness **336**, movable seat back frame **510** and the optional integrated child restraint system **605**. The anchorages and mounts are also configurable for use with seats **120**, **220**, **300**. It will be appreciated, that the upper anchorages and mounts further may be configured for use with seat **400** or for use with a conventional vehicle seat if retention of passive restraint characteristics is not desired.

The upper tether anchorage systems **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** alter or redirect the direction of a web in substantially the same manner using either a loop of web **672** or a D-ring **680**, or other suitable device. For example, the upper tether systems **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** may receive a tether strap or web **27** (FIGS. **32** and **40**) proceeding upwardly from a portable child restraint system or seat **10d** and redirect the upward path of said strap **27** downwardly toward a lower anchorage **34** for coupling therewith in substantially the same manner

as with web **171** shown in FIG. **29**. In such a case, the lower anchorage **34** will transfer loads from the tether strap to the vehicle structure. It will be appreciated that the tether **27** could also be routed through an upper anchorage **32** and downwardly to the lower anchorage **34** for anchoring. In either case, the illustrative route is depicted in FIG. **29** in conjunction with a positioning harness **171** which will be discussed below.

The illustrative tether anchorage systems **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** will now be described. Illustratively, upper tether system **670** comprises a length of web **671** formed into a routing loop **672** at one end by doubling one end of the web **671** back on, and coupling it to, itself as by, for example, stitching **673** (FIG. **30**). The other end of the length of web **671** is mounted or attached by any suitable method to the seat back frame **510** thereby retaining the passive restraint characteristics of restraint system **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. One illustrative method of mounting the tether system **670** is by stitching. For example, the other end of web **671** could have a loop formed by stitching (FIG. **30**) and configured to receive a retaining member **778**. The web **671** could be threaded through aperture **776** in top crossbar member **514** and then coupled thereto by inserting the retaining member **778** through the loop as depicted in FIG. **30**. It will be appreciated that system **670** and each of the other illustrative tether mount systems **770**, **870**, **970**, which will now be explained, may use other suitable mounting methods. It also will be appreciated that web **171** could be threaded through loop **671** in the same manner as tether **27** in FIG. **30**, and in such a case, could be mounted to seat **700** as depicted in FIG. **29**, or to other seats **500**, **600** having upper anchorages.

In another illustrative embodiment, upper loop tether system **770** comprises a length of web **671** coupled at one end to a metal latch plate or tongue **674** (FIG. **31**). The upper tether mount system **770** further comprises a buckle **675** and a web loop **672** coupled to said buckle **675** as by, for example, stitching **673**. The tongue **674** and the buckle **675** are configured for releasable engagement with each other. The other end of the length of web **671** is attached to the seat back frame **510** by any suitable method, such as for example the already explained retaining member **778**, thereby retaining the passive restraint characteristics of restraint system **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. The tether **27** is routed through upper tether mount system **770** in the same manner as with tether system **670**.

Referring to FIG. **32**, another illustrative upper tether anchorage system **870** comprises a length of web **671** coupled at one end to a metal D-ring **680**. D-ring **680** is formed to include an open-ended web routing aperture **682** and a web mounting aperture **681**, through which the web **671** is threaded and looped back on itself to couple the web **671** and D-ring **680** together by, for example, stitching **673**. The web **171** or tether **27** is routed through the aperture **682** to direct its path downwardly for coupling with the lower anchorage **32**. The other end of web **671** is mounted to seat back frame **510** by any suitable method, such as for example the already explained retaining member **778**, thereby retaining the passive restraint characteristics of restraint system **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**.

Another illustrative embodiment is depicted in FIG. **33**. Upper tether anchorage system **970** illustratively comprises a length of web **671** coupled at one end to a metal latch plate or tongue **674**. The upper loop tether system **970** further comprises a metal D-ring **680** coupled to said buckle **675** as by, for example, rivets, it being appreciated that an intervening web (not shown) could couple the buckle **675** and the D-ring **680** together, as by, for example, stitching. D-ring

680 is formed to include an open-ended web routing aperture 682 through which a web, such as web 171 or tether 27 (FIG. 40), is routed in order to change the direction of any such web 27. The tongue 674 and the buckle 675 are configured for releasable engagement with each other. The other end of the length of web 671 is attached to the seat back frame 510 by any suitable method, such as for example stitching, thereby retaining the passive restraint characteristics of restraint system 400, 500, 600, 700.

It will be appreciated that the D-ring 682 may be made of any suitable metallic material, such as die-cast from zinc or stamped from steel, and that it may be overmolded with another material, such as plastic, to protect any web, such as tether 27 or the below explained web 171, from sharp edges. Alternatively, the D-ring 682 may be fashioned out of any suitable metallic, non-metallic or composite material or combination thereof. Each of the couplings and attachments mentioned above in conjunction with systems 670, 770, 870, 970 could be accomplished using not only the illustrative retaining member 778 already described, but also any suitable method including, for example, rivet, screw, nail, glue, stitching or melting.

Referring now to FIGS. 39, 40, and 45, illustrative embodiments of add-on child restraint systems, illustratively portable child seats 10c, 10d and 10e, are depicted mounted to a vehicle seat 10a as described herein and as adaptable for use with any of systems 300, 400, 500, 600, 700. The portable child restraint seats 10c–10e illustratively include a child restraint anchorage system comprising the above mentioned upper tether strap 27 (FIG. 40) and two lower anchor straps 29. As just described, the upper tether mounts 670, 770, 870, 970 and anchorages 32 are configured for use with tether strap 27. Alternatively, the strap may be equipped with a connector assembly 38 as described herein to provide releasable engagement with an upper anchorage 32. In any event, tether strap 27 may be equipped with a mid-belt or integrated adjuster (not shown) to provide proper fit to the strap 27 in operational engagement. It will be appreciated that although rear facing seat 10e may have a tether strap 27, it typically is not used when the seat 10e is mounted in the rear facing orientation. Moreover, the tether strap need not be used in mounting any of the portable child seats 10c–10e, and likely will not be used when mounting to seat 400 in order to retain the passive restraint characteristics of seat 400. The mounting of the add-on child seats 10c–10e is completed by coupling the lower anchor straps with lower anchorages 34 as follows. The lower anchor straps 29 are attached, either fixedly or removably, to the seats 10c, 10d. The distal end of each strap 29 is configured with a connector assembly 38, which lockingly engages anchorages 34 to mount the portable seat 10c–10e to seat 10a or to any of systems 300, 400, 500, 600, 700. Web adjusters 40, which may be in-line mid-belt adjusters or adjusters integrated into connectors 38, are used to provide proper fit of straps 29 in operational engagement by, for example, decreasing the length of connecting straps 29 when adjustment portions 42 are pulled away from the adjusters 40 thereby firmly securing the seat 10c–10e to the seat 10a, 10b, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700.

Thus, portable child seat 10c–10e may be mounted to any vehicle seat 10a, including the bus seat 10b depicted in FIG. 44 and any of seat systems 300, 400, 500, 600, 700 as just described. The restraint of the occupant of the portable child seat 10c–10e is provided by the restraint system 60d, 60e integral to the particular seat 10c, 10d and 10e (not shown). Also, either of the portable child seats 10c and 10d may be mounted in a rear-facing orientation as depicted with por-

table child seat 10e in FIG. 45. The rear facing mounting is typically for use with children weighing less than 20 pounds, and may be similarly mounted to the vehicle seat, but, as noted without using the upper tether 27.

Seat 700 may further comprise a harness positioning system 170 configured for mounting to seat 700 using any one of upper tether system mounts 670, 770, 870, 970 or anchorages 32, 136, 236. Positioning harness 170 comprises a length of web 171 having a chest or torso portion 172, a back portion 178, and opposite ends each coupled to a connector 38. The positioning harness 170 is releasably engaged or mounted on the seat as follows. The connector 38 coupled to one end of the web 171 is releasably engaged with the anchorage 34 distal from buckle 343. The web 171 then proceeds from said distal anchorage 34 upwardly and diagonally toward upper tether mount 870 (FIGS. 29, 32) or other illustrative upper tether system mount 670, 770, 970 (FIGS. 29–33) continuing therethrough and downwardly away therefrom continuing downwardly along the cushion 384 to the anchorage 34 proximal to buckle 343 where the connector 38 on the other end of web 171 is releasably engaged with said proximal anchorage 34. A height adjuster (not shown) similar to height adjuster 58 may be slidably mounted to torso portion 172 and back portion 179. It will be appreciated that the connector 38 at either end of the web 171 may be engaged with its respective round bar or other anchorage 34 first, or that they may be connected at the same time.

Harness 170 is operationally engaged about a passenger (not shown) as follows. One end of web 171 is releasably engaged with the distal anchorage 34. The web 171 then proceeds upwardly over the torso of an occupant or passenger and through the upper tether system mount 670, 770, 870, 970 and downwardly away therefrom continuing downwardly behind the passenger to releasably engage the other connector 38 with the proximal anchorage 34. Then, the previously described three-point restraint web 336, or other conventional restraint web, is releasably engaged about the passenger, crossing over the positioning harness 170 generally at point 53. It will be appreciated, that the order of engagement and/or the crossing of the webs 171 and 336 may be reversed. For example, the illustrative positioning harness depicted in FIG. 37 and explained below shows a positioning harness 70b passing beneath the vehicle harness 61. When so engaged about a passenger, the positioning harness 170 will position a passenger for beneficial use of harness 336, and accordingly, the positioning harness 170 will not alter the previous descriptions of the use of the harness 336 in conjunction with the passive restraint of seat restraint system 400 or the combination passive and active restraint of seat restraint systems 500, 600. Those skilled in the art will further appreciate that a crotch belt could be added to web 336 as, for example, is shown and described in FIG. 38 below.

Web 171 and portable child restraint seats 10c, 10d may also be mounted to the vehicle seat using other suitable anchorage systems such as for example systems 136, 236. For example, referring to FIG. 34, connector 136, which comprises a snap hook or other connector configured to mount to a length of web 171, 27 either directly or through another length of web coupled with a web adjuster 31, may be used to couple web 171, 27 to an upper anchorage 32. Web portion 172 illustratively could be mounted through an adjuster 31 and extends therefrom downwardly behind a passenger or occupant (not shown) for coupling with anchorage 34 as described above. It will be appreciated that the connector 36 disclosed above could be configured for

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use as depicted with web 171 in FIG. 34 and used in substantially the same way with tether 27. Similarly, coupling assembly or connector 236 comprises a conventional tongue attached to the vehicle seat back frame 510, or other suitable frame or portion of a vehicle seat, and configured to releasably couple with a buckle attached to a length of web such as web 171, 27 either directly or through another length of web coupled with a web adjuster 31. Web portion 172 is threaded through adjuster 31 and extends therefrom downwardly behind an occupant (not shown) for coupling with anchorage 34 as described above. Coupling assembly 236 is also configurable for use with tether 27 described above. These connectors 136, 236 are configurable for use with vehicle restraint system seat 120, 220, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, as well as the restraint systems 20a-c and alternative positioning harnesses 70a-c described below. Moreover, these connectors 136, 236 may be used in conjunction with upper tether mounts 670, 770, 870, 970. For example, the tongue of connector 236 could be attached, as by sewing, to web 671 of one of the upper tether mounts 670, 770, 870, 970. In such a case, a positioning harness, such as positioning harnesses 70a-70c described below, could be configured with a buckle to engage the tongue as described above, and a tether 27 could be configured for use with the tether mount.

As just described, and as with seat restraint systems 500, 600, seat restraint system 700, even with portable child restraint seats 10c-10e, harness positioning system 171, the below described harness positioning systems 70a-70c, or the below described harnesses 20a-20c attached, maintains the passive restraint characteristics of seat restraint system 400. Those skilled in the art will appreciate that the restraint system 700 could also be configured for use with the previously described systems 120, 220, 300. It further will be appreciated that the restraint system 170 is adaptable for use with a conventional seat. As with seat restraint systems 400, 500, 600 the seat restraint system 700 preserves the under seat clearance for cleaning, maintenance and other vehicle features.

It further will be appreciated that alternative harness positioning systems fall within the scope of this disclosure and may be configured either for use with upper loop tether systems 670, 770, 870, 970, or with alternative means of operative engagement with vehicle seats 120, 220, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700 such as the above mentioned alternative anchorages 32, 136, 236. For example, referring to FIGS. 36-38, and 44, additional illustrative embodiments of harness positioning systems 70a-70c for use with vehicle seats 10a, 10b, 120, 220, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, and with any other conventional original equipment manufactured restraint systems are depicted. Vehicle seat 10a herein below represents a conventional vehicle seat, or one-half or one-third respectively of a two-passenger or three-passenger seat, such as for example seats 120, 220, 300, 400, 500, 600, 700, and having a generally vertically extending back portion 12 and a generally horizontally extending seat portion 16. The illustrative embodiment depicted in FIG. 36 shows conventional restraint system 60a having a belt or web 61 including a chest portion 62 and a lap portion 64. Web 62 is fixedly secured at its proximal end (not shown) to seat 10a, which may be any conventional seat or any of the seats 300, 400, 500, 600, 700 described herein, and extends outwardly away from aperture 63 and downwardly away therefrom across the torso of the occupant (not shown). A conventional belt buckle tongue 65 is slidably coupled to web 62 and is lockingly engageable with seat belt buckle 69. Buckle 69, in turn, is attached by web 67 to seat 10a. Lap portion 64 of web 62 extends laterally away from tongue 65 and is fixedly

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secured at its distal end (not shown) to seat 10a. Thus, tongue 65 may lockingly engage buckle 69 thereby forcing the torso portion 62 across the shoulder and chest of the occupant residing on the seat and the lap portion 64 across the lap of the occupant. Restraint system 60a may be equipped with a belt retractor assembly (not shown) or with one or more web adjusters (not shown) configured to adjust the fit of the belt 61 on the occupant. Positioning system 70a comprises belt or web 72 extending from attachment point or anchor 73, which may be coupled, for example, to seat back frame 510, downwardly away and transversely across toward connector assembly 79. Connector 79 illustratively has an integrated web adjuster configured to adjust the length of web 72 by pulling on adjustment end or portion 42 to shorten the length. As shown, fixed attachment point 73 comprises a bracket bolted to the seat frame (not shown) and connector assembly 79 is a conventional tongue and buckle configuration; however, it will be recognized that any suitable configuration, such as shown in FIGS. 34-35, may be used. For example, attachment 73 and connection 79 may be configured to take advantage of an upper anchorage 32 cooperating with a connector 36, 136, 236. Restraint system 60a and positioning system 70a cross the occupant as generally indicated by point 53 in order to provide cooperating positioning and restraint to the occupant. It is equally acceptable for web 72 to cross over the top of web 61, or for web 61 to cross over the top of web 72.

The illustrative embodiments depicted in FIGS. 37 and 44 are substantially similar to each other in operation and construction. The embodiment depicted in FIG. 37 shows the positioning system 70b configured on a seat 10a generic to any vehicle in general or on a seat 10a representing a half or a third of a two- or three-passenger seat, such as vehicle seats 300, 400, 500, 600, 700. The embodiment depicted in FIG. 44 shows more specifically the positioning harness system 70b specifically adapted to a two-passenger seat 10b, as for example, any vehicle seat 300, 400, 500, 600, 700 disclosed in this application Referring to FIGS. 37 and 44 reveals a conventional restraint system 60b having belt or web 61 including a chest portion 62 and a lap portion 64. Web 62 is fixedly secured at its proximal end (not shown) to seat 10a and extends outwardly away from aperture 63 and downwardly away therefrom across the torso of the wearer. A conventional belt buckle tongue 65 is slidably coupled to web 62 and is lockingly engageable with seat belt buckle 69. Buckle 69, in turn, is attached by web 67 to seat 10a. Lap portion 64 of web 62 extends laterally away from tongue 65 and is fixedly secured at its distal end (not shown) to seat 10a. Thus, tongue 65 may lockingly engage buckle 69 thereby forcing the torso portion 62 across the shoulder and chest of the occupant residing on the seat and the lap portion 64 across the lap of the occupant. Restraint system 60b may be equipped with a belt retractor assembly (not shown) or with one or more web adjusters (not shown) configured to adjust the fit of the belt 61 on the occupant. Restraint harness 60b further includes a height guide web or belt 68 extending from aperture 66 downwardly toward the bight of the seat, where belt 8 is fixedly attached to, for example, the frame of seat 10a. Slidably mounted to belts 61 and 68 is height adjuster 58. Height adjuster 58 is configured to associate belts 61 and 68 and slides up and down their length to adjust the position of the belts 61 and 68 on the wearer's shoulder. When properly configured on a wearer, web portion 62 falls over the wearer's chest and web 68 falls over the wearer's back.

Seat 10a is depicted with a pair of spaced apart anchorages 34 which illustratively are rigid members or D-ring

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anchorage **34** mounted in the bight of the seat **10a** between the back **12** and seat **16** portions. As noted, anchorages **34** may conform to FMVSS 225. Also depicted are upper anchorages **32**, which may also serve as an upper tether anchorage or redirection member that receives and redirects toward a lower anchorage **34** a tether strap or web **27**. Positioning system **70b** comprises belt or web **72** having opposing ends. The upper opposing end is attached to three-bar slide **59** and lower opposing end is attached to connector assembly **38**. Web **72** extends downwardly away from slide **59** transversely across back portion **12** to anchorage **34**, which is releasably engage by connector **38**. Slide **59** is slidably coupled to height guide web or belt **78**, and slidably associates webs **72** and **78**. Web **78** has opposing ends having connector assemblies **36** and **38** attached respectively thereto. Connector assembly **38** releasably engages anchor point **32**, and connector assembly **38** releasably engages anchorage **34**. Web **78** extends downwardly from anchor point **32** longitudinally downward toward anchorage **34**. The illustrative embodiment of FIG. **37** depicts each connector **38** in the unengaged position, and the illustrative embodiment of FIG. **44** depicts the connector **38** of web **78** in the unengaged position. Connectors **36** and **38** may have an integrated web adjuster (not shown) or may have an in-line adjuster **40** configured to adjust the lengths of web **72** and **78** by pulling on adjustment portion **42** to shorten the length of web **72** and **78**. When properly configured on a wearer, web portion **72** falls over the wearer's chest and web **78** falls down the wearer's back. Restraint system **60b** and positioning system **70b** cross the occupant as generally indicated by location **53** in order to provide cooperating support and restraint to the occupant. When properly configured on the wearer, belts **62** and **72** will fall over the wearer's chest, and belts **68** and **78** will fall down the wearer's back, with height adjuster **58** and slide **59** being positioned near to the wearer's shoulders, thereby forming a four-point restraint. It will be appreciated that restraint system **70b**, in whole or in part, may either underlie or overlie restraint system **60b** and vice versa.

Referring to FIG. **38**, another illustrative embodiment is depicted. Harness positioning system **70c** is substantially similar in operation to positioning system **70b** described and depicted in FIGS. **37** and **44**. Restraint system **70c**, further comprises a crotch assembly **80** having a crotch belt **82** slidably disposed on lap belt or portion **64** and extending longitudinally downwardly therefrom to tongue **85**, which is fixedly connected to the distal end of belt **82**. Tongue **85** is lockingly engageable with belt buckle **89**, which, in turn, is attached (not shown) by web **84** to seat **10a**. Web **84** may also be attached to the vehicle's floor, the child's seat, or other suitable anchor point. Web **82** lies between the wearer's legs, and has its length, or fit on the wearer, adjusted by pulling on web portion **86**. Crotch assembly **80** cooperates with the previously described restraint assemblies **60c** and **70c** to form a five-point restraint system suitable for use with wearers weighing less than about fifty pounds. This positioning harness system **70c** could also be adapted for use on any vehicle, including the school bus seat **10b** depicted in FIG. **44**, or vehicle seats **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. Also, any of the other herein described four-point restraint systems **70a**, **70b** may be configured as a five-point system by adding the crotch assembly **80** thereto.

Illustratively, web **72** of the harness positioning systems **70b**, **70c** (FIGS. **37**, **38**, **44**) has a fully extended length measured from the slide **59** to the lower adjuster **40** of between about 35 to 45 inches, and typically about 40 inches. The length of web **78** from the connector **36** down to

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the web adjuster **40** is between about 20 to 25 inches, and typically about 23 inches fully extended. The length between the web adjusters **40** and the connectors **38** on both webs **78**, **72** is in a range from about two to five inches, and typically about three inches. It will be appreciated that other suitable lengths may be used. As noted each of the harness positioning systems **171**, **70a-c**, may be operably mounted over or under the vehicle's restraint harness as best seen with positioning harness **70b** depicted mounted under the vehicle harness **61** in FIG. **37** and over the vehicle harness **61** in FIG. **44**.

Referring to FIG. **41**, an illustrative embodiment of another harness positioning system **20a** in accordance with the present invention is depicted. The illustrative system **20a** is configured for use with a vehicle seat **10a** having a generally vertically extending back portion **12** and a generally horizontally extending seat portion **16** and is adaptable for use with any of systems **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. Positioning harness **20a** comprises a pair of spaced apart body straps or web belts **22** and **24**, which extend around the body of a wearer of the harness **20a**. Upper body strap **22** and lower body strap **24** are generally parallel one to the other and with the seat portion **16**. Generally vertically extending and spaced apart connecting straps **26** connect upper strap **22** with lower strap **24**. The connecting straps **26** are generally parallel to each other and are generally perpendicular to body straps **22** and **24** and to seat **16**. While three connecting straps **26** are shown, alternative embodiments, for example FIG. **42**, may use a fewer or a greater number of connecting straps. Similarly, a harness **20a** equipped with more than two body straps falls within the scope of the invention. Connecting straps **26** are attached to body strap **24** at attachment points **45** and extend longitudinally upwardly away therefrom to attachment points **46** on body strap **22**. Each body strap **22** and **24** is equipped with a connector assembly **23a** and **25a**, which is located at the front of the restraint harness **20a**, and which is used to secure the opposing ends of respective straps **22** and **24** together in order to mount the harness **20a** to the wearer. The connector assembly **23a** and **25a** may also be located at the back (**23b** and **25b** in FIG. **42**) or on the side of the body strap **22** and **24**. Body straps **22** and **24** each further includes a web adjuster **31** slidably mounted to straps **22** and **24** and configured to adjust the fit of the harness **20a** on the wearer. Web adjusters **31** and **33** may be included as a part of the respective connector assembly **23a** and **25a**, or may be mid-belt web adjusters separate from the respective connector assembly **23a** and **25a**. Although not shown, it will be appreciated that connecting straps **26** may also be equipped with web adjusters adapted to adjust the vertical spacing between body straps **22** and **24** in order to further adjust the harness **20a** to fit the wearer as known to those skilled in the art.

A pair of spaced apart upper anchor straps **28** are attached to upper body strap **22** at connection points **46** and extend upwardly away therefrom. A pair of spaced apart lower anchor straps **29** are attached to lower body strap **24** at connection points **45** and extend generally downwardly away therefrom. Each anchor strap **28** and **29** has at its end distal from the respective body strap **22** and **24** a coupling mechanism **36** and **38** for releasably mounting the harness **20a** to the seat **10a**.

Connectors **36** and **38** releasably and lockingly engage anchorages **32** and **34** to mount the restraint system **20a** to the seat **10a**. Each anchor strap **28** and **29** also includes a web adjuster **40** either slidably mounted to the strap **28** and **29** as a mid-belt adjuster, as shown, or integrated into the

connector **36** and **38**. In operation, each adjustment end or portion **42** of each connector strap **28** and **29** is pulled away from the adjuster **40** in order to reduce the operable length of the connector strap **28** and **29**. The upper portions of straps **28** may be configured to fall over the shoulders of the wearer, or under the arms.

Referring now to FIG. **42**, another illustrative embodiment of a harness positioning system is depicted. Positioning harness **20b** is operably substantially similar to harness **20a**. The illustrative positioning system **20b** is configured for use with vehicle seat **10a** as described above having a generally vertically extending back portion **12** and a generally horizontally extending seat portion **16** and is adaptable for use with any of systems **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. Restraint harness **20b** comprises a pair of spaced apart body straps or web belts **22** and **24**, which extend around the body of a wearer of the harness **20b**. Upper body strap **22** and lower body strap **24** are generally parallel one to the other and with the seat portion **16**. Generally vertically extending and spaced apart connecting straps **26** connect upper strap **22** with lower strap **24**. The connecting straps **26** are generally parallel to each other and are generally perpendicular to body straps **22** and **24** and to seat **16**. While two connecting straps **26** are shown, alternative embodiments may use a greater number of connecting straps. If additional straps **26** are used in this restraint harness, however, they may or may not extend past the body straps **22** and **24**. A harness **20b** equipped with more than two body straps similarly falls within the scope of the invention. Connecting straps **26** are attached to body strap **24** at attachment points **45** and extend longitudinally upwardly away therefrom to attachment points **46** on body strap **22**. Connecting straps **26** continue upwardly from attachment points **46** and downwardly from attachment points **45**. Mounted to each opposing end of each connecting strap **26** is a connector **36**, **38** configured to lockingly engage corresponding anchorage **32**, **34**. Each body strap **22** and **24** is also equipped with a connector assembly **23b** and **25b**, which is located at the back of the restraint harness **20b** proximate to back portion **12**, and which is used to secure the opposing ends of respective straps **22** and **24** together in order to mount the harness **20b** to the wearer. Each connector assembly **23b** and **25b** may also be located at the front (FIG. **41**) or on the side of the body strap **22** and **24**. Body straps **22** and **24** each further includes a web adjuster **31** slidably mounted to straps **22** and **24** and configured to adjust the fit of the harness **20b** on the wearer. Web adjusters **31** and **33** may be included as a part of the respective connector assembly **23b** and **25b**, or may be mid-belt web adjusters separate from the respective connector assembly **23b** and **25b**. Although not shown, it will be appreciated that connecting straps **26** may also be equipped with web adjusters adapted to adjust the vertical spacing between body straps **22** and **24** in order to further adjust the harness **20b** to fit the wearer. In such cases, body straps **22** and **24** would be slidably mounted to straps **26** as opposed to fixedly mounted as by stitching. Harness **20b** further includes a generally horizontal strap **33** extending laterally between and attached to connecting straps **26**. The upper portions of straps **26** may be configured to fall over the shoulders of the wearer, or under the arms.

Referring to FIG. **43**, another illustrative embodiment of a harness positioning system **20c** is depicted. The illustrative positioning system **20c** is configured for use with a vehicle seat **10a** as described above having a generally vertically extending back portion **12** and a generally horizontally extending seat portion **16** and is adaptable for use with any of systems **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**. Positioning harness **20c**

comprises a pair of continuous body straps or web belts **35** and **37**, which extend around the body of a wearer of the harness **20c**. Each opposing end of each Strap **35** and **37** is equipped with coupling mechanisms or connectors **36** and **38** which are lockingly engageable with anchorage **32** and **34**. Strap **35** crosses and is connected to strap **37** at upper location **51** and lower location **52**. In addition, straps **35** and **37** are connected at points **45** and **46** by generally longitudinally extending connecting straps **26**. Each body strap **35** and **37** is also equipped with a connector assembly **23c**, which is used to secure the straps **35** and **37** together in order to mount the harness **20b** to the wearer. Body straps **35** and **37** each include web adjusters **40** slidably mounted to straps **35** and **37** or integrated with connector assemblies **36** and **38** and configured to adjust the fit of the harness **20b** on the wearer. Although not shown, it will be appreciated that connecting straps **26** may also be equipped with web adjusters adapted to adjust the vertical spacing between body straps **35** and **37** in order to further adjust the harness **20b** to fit the wearer. In such cases, body straps **35** and **37** would be slidably coupled to straps **26** as opposed to fixedly mounted as by the depicted stitching **45** and **46**. The upper portions of straps **30** and **31** may be configured to fall over the shoulders of the wearer, or under the arms.

Referring to FIGS. **41–43**, the straps **22**, **24**, **26**, **28**, **29**, **35** and **37** are connected at the respective connection points **45**, **46**, **51** and **52** using stitching. One skilled in the art will appreciate, however, that alternate connections may be used. For example, hook and loop, rivets, zippers, glue, staples, melting or other suitable connecting structures may be used. Similarly, although the connector assembly (**23a**, **25a**) depicted in the illustrative embodiment of FIG. **41** is a standard quick disconnect connector, other connectors, such as, for example, hook and loop (FIGS. **42**, **43**), snaps, tongue and buckle, zippers, clamp, or other suitable coupling structures may be used. So too, alternative connectors may be used, such as for example, the mini-connector **36**, **38** depicted in FIGS. **41–43** and described herein above, snap hooks (FIG. **34**), tongue and buckle (FIG. **35**), upper tether mounts **770**, **970** (FIGS. **31**, **33**), or even some type of fixed attachment such as rivets, bolts, brackets and the like (FIG. **36**). Moreover, a combination of different types of connectors may be used. For example, the mini-connector depicted in FIG. **41** may be used for the lower attachments and a snap hook or permanent attachment may be used for the upper attachments. The harnesses **20a**, **20b**, **20c**, **70a**, **70b**, **70c**, **170** may be mounted to a car seat, a boat seat, an airplane seat, a van seat, a bus seat, or the seat **10a** of any other vehicle. Finally, although not shown, harnesses **20a**, **20b**, **20c** may be equipped with separate conventional shoulder webs or straps such as restraint **60a–60c**.

As noted, FIGS. **34** and **35** depict alternative connector assemblies **136** and **236** for use with either anchor point **32** or **38** of the illustrative embodiments described and shown in FIGS. **41–43**. Similarly, connector assemblies **36**, **38**, **136**, and **236** are adaptable for use with the above described harness positioning systems **70a** (FIG. **36**), **70b** (FIGS. **3** and **44**), and **70c** (FIG. **38**), and with the restraint systems described above and depicted in FIGS. **42**, **43**, **45**. In addition, each of the harnesses positioning systems **171**, **70a–70c**, **20a–20c**, upper tether systems **670**, **770**, **870**, **970**, and portable child restraint seats **10c–10d** described herein are configurable for use with any of the seat systems **120**, **220**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700** described herein. It further will be appreciated that any of the seats **300**, **500**, **600**, **700** are compatible for use with an add-on child restraint system booster seat (not shown) including any backless child

restraint system or belt-positioning seat as those terms are defined by FMVSS 213, typically for use with children weighing less than about 50 pounds and an unrestricted booster seat typically for use with children ranging in size from about 40 to 80 pounds or more.

An example of a suitable web adjuster **31**, **33**, **40** described herein for use with any of the above systems illustratively may be of the kind disclosed in commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/206,660 filed by Woodard et al. on Jul. 26, 2002, the disclosure of which is now expressly incorporated herein by reference. An example of a suitable connector **36**, **38** described herein for use with any of the above systems illustratively may be of the kind disclosed in commonly owned U.S. patent application Ser. No. 10/206,603 filed by Wiseman et al. on Jul. 26, 2002, which is now expressly incorporated herein by reference. Any other suitable conventional connector may be used as well.

The interchangeability of the components of the illustrative embodiments described herein will be appreciated by those skilled in the art. It will also be appreciated that the anchorages **32** and **34** may be removable or integral to the vehicle seat, and that the restraint systems mounted thereto and described and depicted herein may also be either removable or integral to the vehicle seat.

The above described systems are configurable for use in any number of vehicles including mini-vans, mini-buses, and school buses, and in various seat sizes. For example, the seats **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700** illustratively may be about 40 to 50 inches high, and typically will be about 44 inches high from the floor to the top of the cushion **383**. The width of the seats **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700** may range from about 20 to about 45 inches with typical embodiments being about 30 inches, 34 inches, 36 inches, and 45 inches wide. The depth of the seats from the top of the cushion **383** to the front of the seat cushion **386** ranges from about 23 to 30 inches. A typical embodiment will be about 27 inches deep. Illustratively, the floor mount module **430** is about 8 to 14 inches high, and is typically about 11 inches high. The height of the seat cushion **386** from the floor may be about 5 to 25 inches and it typically is about 20 inches.

Thus, it is seen that the modular nature of the above described restraint systems **20a-c**, **70a-c**, **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**, allows for fashioning a number of optional combinations and permutations in both dimensions and restraint systems. The following examples illustrate some, but not all of the possible combinations and permutations that fall within the scope of the disclosure, such examples are not intended to be limiting. For example, each vehicle restraint system **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700** could come in a 30 inch, a 33 inch and a 36 inch wide version. Vehicle seat restraint system **400** could then add one or more pairs of anchorages **34** to frame **410** so that add-on child restraint systems such as portable child seats **10c**, **10d**, **10e** (FIGS. **39**, **40**, **45**) could be added, even while retaining the passive restraint characteristics of seat **400**. So too, a restraint harness **336**, **60a-60c**, could be added to seat restraint system **400**, and then upper tether mounts **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** configured to accommodate any of the positioning harnesses **170**, **70a-70c**, **20a-20c**, albeit perhaps at the diminished functioning of the passive restraint characteristics of seat **400**.

Similarly, vehicle seat restraint system **500** may be configured: (1) with one restraint harness; (2) with two restraint harnesses; (3) with a three-passenger seat having two restraint harnesses **336**, **60a-60c** and/or two pairs of anchorages **34**; (4) with two restraint harnesses and two anchorages

34 for mounting an add-on child restraint system such as a portable child seat **10c**, **10d**, **10e** (FIGS. **39**, **40**, **45**) or a booster seat; (5) with two restraint harnesses, two pairs of anchorages **34**, and two upper tether mounts **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** alone or in combination with two anchorages **32**, **136**, **236** configured to mount up to two positioning harnesses **170**, **70a-70c**, **20a-20c**, and/or up to two add-on child restraint systems such as portable child seats **10c**, **10d**, **10e** (FIGS. **39**, **40**, **45**) or two booster seats; and (6) with two restraint harnesses, two pairs of anchorages **34**, and one or more integrated child restraint systems **605**, which would be substantially equivalent to vehicle seat restraint system **600** depicted in FIG. **27**. Vehicle restraint system **600**, in turn, illustratively could be equipped with upper tether mounts configured to mount up to two positioning harnesses **170**, **70a-70c**, **20a-20c**, and/or up to two add-on child restraint systems such as child restraint seats **10c**, **10d**, **10e** (FIGS. **39**, **40**, **45**) or booster seats, which would be substantially equivalent to vehicle seat restraint system **700** depicted in FIG. **29**, which comprises movable frame **510**, two passenger restraint harnesses **336**, **60a-60c**, one or two integrated child restraint systems **605**, one or two booster seats (not shown), one or two pairs of lower anchors **34** configured to mount one or two add-on child restraint systems such as portable child seats **10c**, **10d** (FIGS. **39**, **40**, **45**), one or two upper tether mounts **670**, **770**, **870**, **970** configured to mount, in conjunction with the lower anchorages **34**, one or two positioning harnesses **170**, **70a-70c**, **20a-20c**, and/or up to two portable child restraint seats **10c**, **10d**. In addition, each of the just mentioned examples may further vary by cushion and upholstery type, connectors, construction material, vehicle mounting means, e.g., **30**, **126**, **226**, **301-303**, **430**, **437**, and the like as has been described herein above and as would be apparent to one skilled in the art. Finally, any of the above examples may further be configured for use with a child booster seat using the anchorages **34** and the restraint harness, e.g., **60a-60c**, **150**, **250**, **336**. These examples are meant to be illustrative rather than limiting in nature. It will be appreciated that the modular nature of the illustrative embodiments also allows for the above combinations and permutations to be configured and deconfigured by changing components in and out as needed without the need to replace an entire seat **300**, **400**, **500**, **600**, **700**.

While the invention has been illustrated and described in detail in the drawings and foregoing description, the same is to be considered as illustrative and not restrictive in character, it being understood that all changes and modifications that come within the spirit of the invention are desired to be protected.

What is claimed is:

1. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

first and second posts coupled to and extending away from said seat support surface of said frame adjacent opposite ends thereof;

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame; and

a panel defining first and second channels adjacent opposite edges thereof, said panel defining a seat back with said first and second posts received within said first and second channels respectively;

wherein, the first and second posts are structurally associated only by the frame and by the panel.

2. The modular vehicle seat of claim 1 further including first and second frame mounting members mounted to said

frame adjacent said opposite ends thereof, said frame mounting members configured for mounting to the frame support structure of the vehicle.

3. The modular vehicle seat of claim **2** wherein the frame support structure of the vehicle includes a floor of the vehicle.

4. The modular vehicle seat of claim **3** wherein the frame support structure of the vehicle includes a sidewall of the vehicle.

5. The modular vehicle seat of claim **1** wherein said seat member is formed of a lightweight plastic material.

6. The modular vehicle seat of claim **5** wherein said light weight plastic material defines therein a number of recesses configured to impart rigidity to selected regions of said seat member.

7. The modular vehicle seat of claim **1** wherein said frame includes first, second, third, fourth and fifth elongate members interconnected to form a generally rectangular structure defining said seat support surface.

8. The modular vehicle seat of claim **7** wherein said seat member has a top surface configured to support at least one passenger and an opposite bottom surface having a number of retaining clips attached thereto and engaging one or more of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members to thereby mount said seat member to said seat support surface of said frame.

9. The modular vehicle seat of claim **8** wherein said bottom surface of said seat member defines a number of protrusions extending therefrom each in contact with one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members;

wherein at least one of said number of protrusions has one of said number of retaining clips mounted thereto;

and wherein at least one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members is trapped between said at least one of said number of protrusions and said one of said number of retaining clips mounted thereto when said seat member is mounted to said seat support surface of said frame.

10. The modular vehicle seat of claim **9** wherein said seat member is configured to flex in response to pressure applied to said top surface such that said number of protrusions move relative to respective ones of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members.

11. The modular vehicle seat of claim **10** wherein each of said number of protrusions defines therein a groove in contact with one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members, each of said grooves defined within said number of protrusions rotating about one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members as said seat member flexes in response to said pressure applied to said top surface.

12. The modular vehicle seat of claim **11** wherein said seat member is formed of a lightweight plastic material.

13. The modular vehicle seat of claim **12** wherein said light weight plastic material defines therein a number of recesses and grooves configured to impart rigidity to selected regions of said seat member.

14. The modular vehicle seat of claim **1** further including a first cushion affixed to said seat member.

15. The modular vehicle seat of claim **1** wherein said panel is deformable to absorb energy resulting from an impact therewith.

16. The modular vehicle seat of claim **15** wherein said first and second posts are deformable to absorb energy resulting from an impact with said panel.

17. The modular vehicle seat of claim **16** wherein first and second posts and said panel are together sufficiently deformable to satisfy a predefined deformability standard.

18. The modular vehicle seat of claim **17** wherein said predefined deformability standard is Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 222 extant on September 2002.

19. The modular vehicle seat of claim **1** wherein said panel is formed of a lightweight plastic material.

20. The modular vehicle seat of claim **19** wherein said light weight plastic material defines therein a number of recesses and grooves configured to impart rigidity to selected regions of said panel.

21. The modular vehicle seat of claim **19** wherein said panel has a front surface adjacent said seat member and an opposite rear surface, said panel defining a number of recesses and protrusions along said front and rear surfaces thereof;

wherein one or more of said number of recesses and protrusions define in said rear surface at least one energy absorbing crush zone.

22. The modular vehicle seat of claim **21** wherein said panel defines a panel bottom adjacent said seat member and an opposite panel top;

and wherein at least a first one of said number of said recesses and protrusions adjacent said panel bottom define in said rear surface of said panel a knee crush zone having a first energy absorbing characteristic.

23. The modular vehicle seat of claim **22** wherein at least a second one of said number of recesses and protrusions adjacent said panel top define in said rear surface of said panel a head crush zone having a second energy absorbing characteristic.

24. The modular vehicle seat of claim **23** wherein at least a third one of said number of recesses and protrusions between said panel top and said panel bottom define in said rear surface of said panel a chest crush zone having a third energy absorbing characteristic.

25. The modular vehicle seat of claim **24** wherein said first, second and third energy absorbing characteristics are defined by an established motor vehicle safety standard.

26. The modular vehicle seat of claim **25** wherein said established motor vehicle safety standard is Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 222 extant on Sep. 17, 2002.

27. The modular vehicle seat of claim **14** wherein said panel has a front surface adjacent said seat member and an opposite rear surface, the modular vehicle seat further including a second cushion affixed to said front surface of said panel.

28. The modular vehicle seat of claim **27** further including a third cushion affixed to said rear surface of said panel.

29. The modular vehicle seat of claim **27** wherein said first and second cushions each include a plurality of bolsters selectively positioned relative thereto to partition the modular vehicle seat into a number of individual occupant sections.

30. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface and first and second posts, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

said first and second posts each having a top end extending away from said seat support surface of said frame adjacent opposite ends thereof;

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame; and

a panel defining spaced apart first and second channels each having a bottom opening, said panel defining a seat back configured to slide over the posts with the respective top end of said first and second posts

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received within and enclosed by the first and second channels respectively.

31. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

first and second spaced-apart posts extending away from said seat support surface of said frame;

said frame including first, second, third, fourth and fifth elongate members interconnected to form a generally rectangular structure defining said seat support surface;

a panel defining spaced-apart first and second channels, said panel defining a seat back with said first and second posts received within said first and second channels respectively

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame;

wherein said seat member has a top surface configured to support at least one passenger and an opposite bottom surface having a number of retaining clips attached thereto and engaging one or more of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members to thereby mount said seat member to said seat support surface of said frame;

wherein said bottom surface of said seat member defines number of protrusions extending therefrom each in contact with one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members;

wherein at least one of said number of protrusions has one of said number of retaining clips mounted thereto;

wherein at least one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members is trapped between said at least one of said number of protrusions and said one of said number of retaining clips mounted thereto when said seat member is mounted to said seat support surface of said frame; and

wherein said seat member is configured to flex in response to pressure applied to said top surface such that said number of protrusions move relative to respective ones of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members.

32. The modular vehicle seat of claim **31** wherein each of said number of protrusions defines therein a groove in contact with one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members, each of said grooves defined within said number of protrusions rotating about one of said first, second, third and fourth elongate members as said seat member flexes in response to said pressure applied to said top surface.

33. The modular vehicle seat of claim **32** wherein said seat member is formed of a lightweight plastic material.

34. The modular vehicle seat of claim **33** wherein said light weight plastic material defines therein a number of recesses and grooves configured to impart rigidity to selected regions of said seat member.

35. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

first and second posts extending away from said seat support surface of said frame adjacent opposite ends thereof;

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame;

a panel defining first and second channels adjacent opposite edges thereof, said panel defining a seat back with

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said first and second, posts received within said first and second channels respectively,

said panel being deformable to absorb energy resulting from an impact therewith; and

wherein said first and second posts are deformable to absorb energy resulting from an impact with said panel.

36. The modular vehicle seat of claim **35** wherein first and second posts and said panel are together sufficiently deformable to satisfy a predefined deformability standard.

37. The modular vehicle seat of claim **36** wherein said predefined deformability standard is Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 222 extant on Sep. 17, 2002.

38. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

first and second posts extending away from said seat support surface of said frame adjacent opposite ends thereof;

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame;

a panel defining first and second channels adjacent opposite edges thereof, said panel defining a seat back with said first and second posts received within said first and second channels respectively;

said panel being formed of a lightweight plastic material; wherein said panel has a front surface adjacent said seat member and an opposite rear surface, said panel defining a number of recesses and protrusions along said front and rear surfaces thereof; and

wherein one or more of said number of recesses and protrusions define in said rear surface at least one energy absorbing crush zone.

39. The modular vehicle seat of claim **38** wherein said panel defines a panel bottom adjacent said seat member and an opposite panel top;

and wherein at least a first one of said number of said recesses and protrusions adjacent said panel bottom define in said rear surface of said panel a knee crush zone having a first energy absorbing characteristic.

40. The modular vehicle seat of claim **39** wherein at least a second one of said number of recesses and protrusions adjacent said panel top define in said rear surface of said panel a head crush zone having a second energy absorbing characteristic.

41. The modular vehicle seat of claim **40** wherein at least a third one of said number of recesses and protrusions between said panel top and said panel bottom define in said rear surface of said panel a chest crush zone having a third energy absorbing characteristic.

42. The modular vehicle seat of claim **41** wherein said first, second and third energy absorbing characteristics are defined by an established motor vehicle safety standard.

43. The modular vehicle seat of claim **42** wherein said established motor vehicle safety standard is Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard (FMVSS) 222 extant on Sep. 17, 2002.

44. A modular vehicle seat comprising:

a frame defining a seat support surface, said frame configured for mounting to a frame support structure of a vehicle;

first and second posts extending away from said seat support surface of said frame adjacent opposite ends thereof;

a seat member mounted to said seat support surface of said frame;

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a first cushion affixed to said seat member;
a panel defining first and second channels adjacent opposite edges thereof, said panel defining a seat back with said first and second posts received within said first and second channels respectively;

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said panel having a front surface adjacent said seat member and an opposite rear surface, the modular

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vehicle seat further including a second cushion affixed to said front surface of said panel; and
wherein said first and second cushions each include a plurality of bolsters selectively positioned relative thereto to partition the modular vehicle seat into a number of individual occupant sections.

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